110th Congress
1st Session

JOINT COMMITTEE PRINT

S. PRT.
110–32

ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2006

REPORT

SUBMITTED TO THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

OF THE

U.S. SENATE

AND THE

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

OF THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BY THE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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

Available via World Wide Web: http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate

OCTOBER 2007

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

ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2006

110th Congress
1st Session

JOINT COMMITTEE PRINT

S. PRT.
110–32

ANNUAL REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2006

REPORT

SUBMITTED TO THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

OF THE

U.S. SENATE

AND THE

COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

OF THE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BY THE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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

OCTOBER 2007

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

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

38–274 PDF WASHINGTON : 2005

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
JOHN E. SUNUNU, New Hampshire
GEORGE V. VOINOVICH, Ohio
LISA MURKOWSKI, Alaska
JIM DEMINT, South Carolina
JOHNNY ISAKSON, Georgia
DAVID VITTER, Louisiana

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

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

TOM LANTOS, California, *Chairman*

HOWARD L. BERMAN, California
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

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
JO ANN DAVIS, Virginia
MIKE PENCE, Indiana
THADDEUS G. MCCOTTER, Michigan
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

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

CONTENTS

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

REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM 2006

COUNTRY INDEX

Africa:

Angola	1
Benin	3
Botswana	5
Burkina Faso	6
Burundi	9
Cameroon	10
Cape Verde	14
Central African Republic	15
Chad	18
Comoros, Union of	22
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	24
Congo, Republic of	26
Cote d'Ivoire	27
Djibouti	33
Equatorial Guinea	34
Eritrea	37
Ethiopia	42
Gabon	47
Gambia, The	49
Ghana	50
Guinea	56
Guinea-Bissau	59
Kenya	60
Lesotho	63
Liberia	65
Madagascar	67
Malawi	69
Mali	71
Mauritania	73
Mauritius	75
Mozambique	77
Namibia	81
Niger	82
Nigeria	84
Rwanda	90
Sao Tome and Principe	94
Senegal	95
Seychelles	97
Sierra Leone	98
Somalia	100
South Africa	102
Sudan	105
Swaziland	113

Page

Africa—Continued
Tanzania 115
Togo 121
Uganda 123
Zambia 126
Zimbabwe 128

East Asia and the Pacific:
Australia 133
Brunei 135
Burma 139
Cambodia 148
China (includes Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet) 150
Hong Kong 165
Macau 168
Tibet 170
China (includes Taiwan only) 177
East Timor 179
Fiji 182
Indonesia 183
Japan 195
Kiribati 196
Korea, Democratic People's Republic of 197
Korea, Republic of 203
Laos 204
Malaysia 213
Marshall Islands 217
Micronesia, Federated States of 218
Mongolia 219
Nauru 221
New Zealand 223
Palau 225
Papua New Guinea 226
Philippines 228
Samoa 232
Singapore 234
Solomon Islands 237
Thailand 238
Tonga 243
Tuvalu 244
Vanuatu 246
Vietnam 247

Europe and Eurasia:
Albania 265
Andorra 269
Armenia 270
Austria 274
Azerbaijan 279
Belarus 284
Belgium 297
Bosnia and Herzegovina 302
Bulgaria 310
Croatia 314
Cyprus 322
Czech Republic 326
Denmark 331
Estonia 334
Finland 337
France 340
Georgia 351
Germany 357
Greece 363
Hungary 371
Iceland 375
Ireland 379
Italy 381
Latvia 385

Page

Europe and Eurasia—Continued
Liechtenstein 389
Lithuania 391
Luxembourg 399
Macedonia 400
Malta 405
Moldova 407
Monaco 412
Netherlands, The 413
Norway 418
Poland 421
Portugal 426
Romania 429
Russia 448
San Marino 478
Serbia and Montenegro 480
Kosovo 485
Slovak Republic 493
Slovenia 499
Spain 501
Sweden 506
Switzerland 510
Turkey 518
Ukraine 526
United Kingdom 535

Near East and North Africa:
Algeria 543
Bahrain 548
Egypt 552
Iran 564
Iraq 575
Israel 584
Occupied Territories, the 597
Jordan 605
Kuwait 611
Lebanon 619
Libya 623
Morocco 626
Western Sahara 630
Oman 630
Qatar 633
Saudi Arabia 635
Syria 646
Tunisia 650
United Arab Emirates 655
Yemen 660

South Asia:
Afghanistan 665
Bangladesh 673
Bhutan 681
India 685
Kazakhstan 711
Kyrgyz Republic 718
Maldives 723
Nepal 726
Pakistan 730
Sri Lanka 749
Tajikistan 757
Turkmenistan 762
Uzbekistan 772

Western Hemisphere:
Antigua and Barbuda 789
Argentina 790
Bahamas 792
Barbados 793
Belize 795

Page

Western Hemisphere—Continued
Bolivia 796
Brazil 798
Canada 800
Chile 804
Colombia 806
Costa Rica 811
Cuba 813
Dominica 818
Dominican Republic 819
Ecuador 821
El Salvador 822
Grenada 824
Guatemala 825
Guyana 827
Haiti 828
Honduras 831
Jamaica 832
Mexico 834
Nicaragua 838
Panama 840
Paraguay 842
Peru 843
Saint Kitts and Nevis 847
Saint Lucia 848
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines 849
Suriname 850
Trinidad and Tobago 852
Uruguay 854
Venezuela 855

APPENDICES

A. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 859
B. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief 863
C. Training at the Foreign Service Institute Related to the International Religious Freedom Act 877
D. Department of Homeland Security and the International Religious Freedom Act 881
E. Overview of U.S. Refugee Policy 883

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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

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

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On behalf of Secretary Rice, we are pleased to transmit the 2006 *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom.* 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, and 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. BERGNER,
Assistant Secretary, Legislative Affairs.

PREFACE

2006 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.

This document, like several other State Department reports, uses the Chicago Manual of Style format. For that reason, it uses a style of capitalization in which, in general, only full proper names are capitalized. In this style, for example, "Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice" is capitalized, but "secretary of state" is not. No disrespect is meant to foreign or domestic leaders through this style of capitalization.

A Word on Usage

When the International Religious Freedom Report states that a country "generally respected" the right of religious freedom over the reporting period, this phrase signifies that the country 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 2006 report covers the period from July 1, 2005, to June 30, 2006, 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, Patricia Aguilo, Philip Barth, Donna Brutkoski, Warren Cofsky, Doug Dearborn, Karen DeBolt, Lisa DeBolt, Sarah Drake, Kenneth Durkin, Maureen Gaffney, Nancy Hewett, Jeremy Howard, Victor Huser, Shellette Jackson, Anthony Jones, Emilie Kao, Patrick Kelly, Stephen Liston, Kathryn Lurie, Mary Maher, Michael Mates, Safia Mohamoud, Joannella Morales, Aaron Pina, and Deborah Schneider. 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

Faith as a personal choice and an essential freedom is a cornerstone of the American character, rooted in the vision of our founding fathers. Freedom of religion has been one of our foremost liberties from the birth of our nation to this day, and the resolve of Americans to champion that freedom—not only at home, but also around the world—has remained steadfast. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has stated, "There is no more fundamental issue for the United States than freedom of religion and religious conscience. This country was founded on that basis, and it is at the heart of democracy."

Religious liberty is America's "first freedom," enshrined in the First Amendment of our Bill of Rights. In the same way, freedom of religion is a cornerstone of universal human rights, for it encompasses freedom of speech, assembly, and conscience, which together form the foundation for democratic governance and respect for the individual. For this reason the growth of democracy we are witnessing today has gone hand in hand with a growth in religious freedom and other human rights. Freedom House, which annually categorizes each nation as "free," "partly free," or "not free" based on a wide range of criteria, including religious freedom, estimated that 44 countries were "free" in 1972, the first year that it released its country ratings. By last year, that number had risen to 89 countries. The number of "not free" countries, in turn, has fallen from 68 in 1972 to 45 today.

Yet, while democracy and respect for basic freedoms have gained ground throughout the world, many governments still pay no more than lip service to their responsibilities under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements. In too many countries, governments refuse to recognize and protect religious freedom. A number of governments actively work against this foundational right. And in some nations today, violent extremists, exploiting religion in the service of an ideology of intolerance and hate, direct their attacks against those who seek only to worship according to the dictates of their conscience. Even as we stand together with those who rightly demand religious freedom, we stand firmly against those who, whether acting on behalf of governments or on behalf of organizations that manipulate faith for violent purposes, impede human liberty and democracy.

The Annual Report on International Religious Freedom was established as a means to help promote and protect this universal right. The report seeks to shed light in those parts of the world where religious persecution is perpetrated, and by that light to impede its progress. The very process underlying the report, of investigating, documenting, and protesting abuses, can help mitigate the violations. That so many endure beatings, torture, and imprisonment, yet remain committed to their beliefs, sometimes even to the point of death, is a testament to the strength and resilience of their faith. The Annual Report on International Religious Freedom testifies to this strength, speaking for the many millions who continue to suffer on the basis of their religious identity, belief, or practice.

This report is a natural outgrowth of our country's history. That which is precious to us, we urge others to protect and preserve as well. Our own record as a nation on this and other freedoms is not perfect. However, our imperfections cannot serve as an excuse to retreat from the challenge of working to make this universal right a reality for all humankind.

As the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, with responsibility to both the President and the Secretary of State as principal advisor on advancing religious freedom worldwide, it is my mission and that of my office to stand with those who seek and promote religious freedom, and against those who would stifle it. Under my direction, the Office of International Religious Freedom undertakes a wide range of activities aimed at implementing U.S. policy on religious freedom, working closely with colleagues in the Department of State and U.S. embassies overseas in order to bring the full set of diplomatic tools to bear on the issue. Through formal and informal bilateral negotiations with foreign governments, participation in multilateral fora such as the United Nations and the Organization for

Security and Cooperation in Europe, cooperation with human rights and faith-based NGOs, and meetings with victims of abuse, we develop and carry out strategies to address persecution wherever it is found.

As we present to Congress and the public this eighth edition of the Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, I wish to express my gratitude for the strong and vigilant leadership of President Bush and Secretary of State Rice on this issue, as well as for the bipartisan support which Congress has provided. We all owe a debt of gratitude, as well, to so many who work in non-governmental organizations on behalf of the oppressed.

The good news, as the Freedom House ranking of countries shows, is that together we are making progress. But clearly, enormous challenges remain. "As the United States advances the cause of liberty," President Bush has said, "we remember that freedom is not America's gift to the world, but God's gift to each man and woman in this world. This truth drives our efforts to help people everywhere achieve freedom of religion and establish a better, brighter and more peaceful future for all."

It is to the courageous men, women, and children around the world who suffer because of their faith that we dedicate this annual report. May it provide some measure of encouragement to their aspirations and some hope that their story is not untold, nor their plight forgotten in the press of world affairs.

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Report

The purpose of this report is to document the actions of governments—those that repress religious expression, persecute innocent believers, or tolerate violence against religious minorities, as well as those that respect, protect, and promote religious freedom. We strive to report equally 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 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 NGOs in promoting religious freedom, and identify and promote changes in the policies and actions of regimes that severely persecute their citizens or others on the basis of religious belief.

The large majority of the world's people have religious beliefs, which they hold dear. It is because religion is viewed by people as having such a central place in their lives that many regard religious freedom as the most important right. 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. The following typology, although far from exhaustive, represents the major types of abuses identified in this report, and may serve as a helpful guide to assessing trends in religious freedom: totalitarian/authoritarian regimes, state hostility toward minority religions, state neglect of societal discrimination, discriminatory legislation that favors majority religions, and denunciation of certain religions 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 and repressive 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 documents it as an abuse when a government broadly represses religious expression among a peacefully practicing population on the grounds of security concerns. For example, the war on terror must not be used as an excuse to repress peaceful worship. 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 are afraid to attend mosque frequently lest the government characterize them as religious extremists.

A second category of abuses occurs with state hostility toward minority or non-approved religions. These governments implement policies designed to demand that adherents recant their faith, cause religious group members to flee the country, or 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 conflicts, harassment, or other harmful acts against minority religious groups. Protecting religious freedom is not just a matter of having good laws in writing. 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 obey. In addition, governments must foster an environment of respect and tolerance for all people. This report documents cases in which a government has failed to prevent violations of religious freedom, or has not responded with consistency and vigor to violations of religious freedom by private actors, nongovernmental entities, or local law enforcement officials.

In a fourth category are abuses that occur when governments have enacted discriminatory legislation or policies that favor majority religions and disadvantage minority religions. This often results from historical dominance by the majority religion and a bias against new or minority religions. In a number of these countries, governments have acted on a widely held ideology that links national identity with a particular religion by enacting legislation that favors the majority religion and discriminates against minority religions. Though the majority of the population in such 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 when the state enforces 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 abuse, 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.

Between July 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006, the period covered by this report, wide-ranging events had implications for religious freedom. One trend was a significant increase in international media attention to religious freedom issues and controversies. Such events included an international backlash in February 2006 against the republication of a series of twelve cartoons depicting satirical images of Mohammed, originally published in September 2005 by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. In choosing to publish them, the European media cited freedom of expression. However, many observers, especially in Europe's minority Muslim communities, interpreted this as a direct attack on or demonstration of intolerance toward the Islamic faith.

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" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Part II provides a summary of conditions in those 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 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). Fol-

lowing 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. These actions range from sanctions to an agreement to a waiver. In countries where U.S. sanctions are currently in force, the Secretary may designate one or more of these sanctions jointly to fulfill the requirements of the IRF Act and other U.S. law. 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 increase religious freedom. In November 2005, the Secretary re-designated Burma, China, North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam as CPCs. Further details on U.S. actions in CPCs and 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 2005 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 facets of society, including with government officials, religious leaders, private citizens, and 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 2005, 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 P.R.C. 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 regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with government leaders, including in his April 2006 and November and September 2005 meetings with President Hu Jintao. Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Barry Lowenkron held talks on religious freedom during a February 2006 visit to Beijing. The U.S. ambassador to China highlighted problems of religious freedom and cases of individual religious prisoners of conscience in his public speeches and in his 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, in 2005 the Secretary of State 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 anti-terrorism efforts. U.S. embassy officials meet regularly with leaders of the religious community. The U.S. ambassador and other embassy officers have raised the cases of detention and restrictions on unregistered religious groups with officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and the leaders of the sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

Iran

Every year since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Iran as a CPC. In 2005, the Secretary continued the designation of a sanction, consisting of restrictions on U.S. security assistance pursuant to the Arms Export Control Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The United States has no diplomatic relations with Iran, and thus it cannot raise directly the restrictions that the Iranian Government places on religious freedom and other abuses the government commits against adherents of minority religious groups. The U.S. Government has expressed strongly its objections to the government's harsh and oppressive treatment of religious minorities

through public statements, support for relevant UN and nongovernmental organization (NGO) efforts, and diplomatic initiatives toward 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. For example, at the fall 2005 session of the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, the United States co-sponsored a successful resolution against Iran, which specifically addressed religious freedom issues among other violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United States has publicly condemned the treatment of the Baha'is in UN resolutions. On numerous occasions, the U.S. State Department has addressed publicly the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities in the country, and the U.S. Government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements.

North Korea

Every year since 2001, the Secretary of State has designated the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (D.P.R.K.) as a CPC. In 2005, 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 D.P.R.K., and raises its concerns about the deplorable state of human rights in the country with other countries and in multilateral fora. For example, the U.S. cosponsored a successful resolution that addressed restrictions on religious freedom at the UN General Assembly in fall 2005. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill has publicly stated that dialogue on the D.P.R.K.'s human rights record will be a part of any future normalization process between the D.P.R.K. and the United States. In April 2005, several State Department officials testified before the House International Relations Committee on the D.P.R.K.'s human rights record and U.S. Government efforts to implement the 2004 North Korean Human Rights Act (NKHRA). They and the U.S. ambassador at large for international religious freedom have repeatedly raised awareness of the deplorable human rights conditions in the D.P.R.K. through speeches before U.S. audiences. In August 2005, the president appointed Jay Lefkowitz as Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea, in keeping with one provision of the NKHRA. Since his appointment, Special Envoy Lefkowitz has urged other countries, including the Republic of Korea and Japan, to join the growing international campaign urging the D.P.R.K. to address its human rights conditions and abuses of religious freedom. Also in 2005, the U.S. Department of State provided a grant of $496,000 to the National Endowment for Democracy to improve and expand monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions in the D.P.R.K., as well as a grant to Freedom House for a series of conferences and other activities dedicated to urging the regime to end its abuses. Radio Free Asia and Voice of America also provide regular Korean-language broadcasting. U.S. Government policy allows U.S. citizens to travel to the country, and a number of churches and religious groups have organized efforts to alleviate suffering caused by shortages of food and medicine.

Saudi Arabia

The Secretary of State first designated Saudi Arabia as a CPC in 2004. Senior U.S. officials and embassy officers met with senior Saudi Government and religious leaders regarding religious freedom, and the U.S. ambassador also raised specific cases of violations with senior officials. U.S. Government officials also met with the Saudi Government to raise their concerns over the dissemination of intolerant literature and an extremist ideology, and discussed the need for the Saudi Government to honor consistently its public commitment to permit private religious worship by non-Muslims, eliminate discrimination against minorities, promote tolerance toward non-Muslims, and respect the rights of Muslims who do not follow the conservative Hanbali tradition of Sunni Islam. These discussions made it possible to identify and confirm a number of key policies that the government is pursuing and will continue to pursue for the purposes of promoting greater freedom for religious practice and increased tolerance for religious groups. These include policies designed to halt the dissemination of intolerant literature and extremist ideology, both within Saudi Arabia and around the world, to protect the right to private worship, and to curb harassment of religious practice. For example, the Saudi Government is conducting a comprehensive revision of textbooks and educational curricula to weed out disparaging remarks toward religious groups, a process that will take one to two more years. The Saudi Government is also retraining teachers and the religious police to ensure that the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims are protected and to promote tolerance and combat extremism. The Saudi Government has also created a

Human Rights Commission to address the full range of human rights complaints. 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 2005 the Secretary continued the designation of one sanction consisting of the use of the voice and vote of the U.S. to abstain on 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 (GNU) 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. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick hosted an interfaith forum with Christian and Muslim leaders in Khartoum during his November 2005 visit. Embassy officials frequently met with leaders of different religious groups. 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 on trips outside the capital.

Vietnam

During the period covered by this report, significant improvements occurred in the status of religious freedom in Vietnam (see Part II). First designated a CPC in 2004, the United States and Vietnam worked closely together in the months that ensued, resulting in an exchange of letters in May 2005 that covered the following issues: full implementation of the new laws on religious activities; instruction of local authorities to strictly and completely adhere to the new legislation and ensure their compliance; facilitation of the process by which religious congregations are able to open houses of worship; and special consideration to prisoners and cases of concern raised by the United States during the granting of prisoner amnesties. This exchange of letters mitigated other actions under the IRF Act. The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City maintain an active and regular dialogue with senior and working-level government officials to advocate greater religious freedom. U.S. officials also meet and communicate regularly with religious leaders of the Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Muslim communities, including religious activists under government scrutiny. 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. The U.S. ambassador and other U.S. officials, including the ambassador at large for international religious freedom, raised concerns about the registration and recognition difficulties faced by religious organizations; the detention and arrest of religious figures; the difficulties Protestants face in the Central Highlands and northern Vietnam, including the Northwest Highlands; and other restrictions on religious freedom with the prime minister, deputy prime minister, government cabinet ministers, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) leaders, provincial officials, and others. The ambassador at large for international religious freedom and his staff traveled to various regions of the country on six occasions between 2003 and 2006 to meet religious leaders and government authorities. The U.S. Government has regularly worked for the release of prisoners deemed to be detained primarily for religious reasons. The government during the period covered by this report freed four individuals viewed by various sources as having been imprisoned in connection with religious activities.

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." While the government generally respected the right to religious freedom, decades of war and years of Taliban rule and weak democratic institutions, including an

unreformed judiciary, have contributed to a conservative culture of intolerance, which at times manifested in acts of harassment and violence against reform-minded Muslims and religious minorities. Widespread condemnations that arose during a case of conversion, and a case of censorship, increased concerns about the ability of Afghans to freely practice their religion. Due to societal pressure, some minority religious believers hide their religion and the Afghan Sikh and Hindu populations faced a number of problems. Relations among the different sects of Islam in the country continued to be difficult. Historically, the minority Shi'a have faced discrimination from the majority Sunni population. Despite these problems, the government took some positive steps during the reporting period to increase religious freedom. The Ministries of Women's Affairs and Religious Affairs worked together to provide women with greater access to mosques. The government also responded positively to international approaches on religious freedom and worked effectively on high-profile legal cases such as the blasphemy charges against journalist Mohaqeq Nasab and the apostasy charges against Christian convert Abdul Rahman.

Brunei

Despite constitutional provisions providing for the full and unconstrained exercise of religious freedom, the Government of Brunei used a range of laws to restrict the expansion of religions other than official Islam. Brunei's various religious groups coexist peacefully, but ecumenical interaction is hampered by the dominant Islamic religious ethos, which discourages Muslims from learning about other faiths and forbids persons of other faiths from proselytizing. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize a range of activities to explain and propagate Islam, and they also offer financial incentives, housing, and new mosques for converts to Islam.

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 organizations. It also systematically restricted efforts by Buddhist clergy to promote human rights and political freedom. The government actively promoted Theravada Buddhism, particularly among minority ethnic groups, and 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 on worship of 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. There was little evidence that new regulations on religious affairs, which took effect in 2005, improved the situation of religious freedom; they continued to 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. In one case in August 2005, Uighur teacher Aminan Momixi and 30 students were detained after Momixi held Qur'an study sessions in her home during summer vacation. In apparent retaliation for the international human rights and religious freedom activism of Uighur Muslim Rebiya Kadeer, the Chinese Government detained and reportedly abused her three adult sons, charging them with financial crimes related to her business ventures in Xinjiang. Followers of Tibetan Buddhism, including in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas of China, faced restrictions on their religious practice and ability to organize. Repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and "house" churches continued to be widely reported. House church leaders sometimes faced detention, formal arrest and sentences of reeducation or imprisonment. Government officials continued to scrutinize closely contacts between citizens and foreigners involved in religion, detaining some citizens for providing religious information to foreigners and preventing some religious figures from traveling abroad, including church historian Zhang Yinan, whom authorities placed under house arrest and refused to issue a passport. In June 2006, Henan Province Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang, was sentenced to 7 ½ years in prison for obtaining a passport through fraud and illegal border crossing. "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. The government showed some signs of willingness to improve relations with the Vatican after the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI but Beijing and the Vatican

clashed in April 2006 over control of the process of ordaining bishops. The government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as "cults" in general and of small Christian-based groups and the Falun Gong in particular. In June 2006 Pastor Xu Shuangfu and five other members of the "Three Grades of Servants" church, which China considers a cult, were sentenced to death in a murder case involving conflict between the church and the Eastern Lightning group, which China also considers a cult. Scores of Three Grades of Servants church members were tried during the period covered by this report. Falun Gong practitioners continued to face arrest, detention, and imprisonment, and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons, and reeducation through labor camps and extra-judicial "legal education" centers.

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.

Some religious figures who criticized the Cuban 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, citizens worshipping in officially sanctioned churches were subject to surveillance by state security forces, and the government's efforts to maintain a strong degree of control over religion continued. The Cuban Government implemented new regulations that restricted the operation of house churches but eased its policy on issuing work permits to foreign Catholic clergy.

Egypt

The Egyptian 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 Shari'a, or Islamic law, are prohibited. Members of the non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the Egyptian Government generally worship without harassment; however, tradition and some aspects of the law discriminated against religious minorities, including Christians and particularly Baha'is, which are not recognized legally. The government continued to deny civil documents, including identity cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to members of the Baha'i community, which numbers 500 to 2,000 persons. It appealed an April 4 decision by the administrative court, that supported the right of Baha'i citizens to receive ID cards and birth certificates with religion noted on the documents. Many churches continued to encounter difficulty with obtaining permits for church repair and rebuilding, despite a presidential decree in December 2005 stating that such permits, previously requiring his approval, could be granted by provincial governors. In the past, the government did not provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status. Over the past 2 years, approximately 32 Muslims who had converted from Christianity have been issued verdicts allowing them to recover their original Christian identities. Metwalli Ibrahim Metwalli Saleh, arrested by the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) in May 2003, apparently for his views on Islam, including support of the right to convert, was released on April 23 after receiving eight separate rulings from the Supreme State Security Emergency Court in his favor and an official statement from the state security prosecutor ordering his release.

Eritrea

Religious freedom did not improve overall, and in some areas deteriorated further. The Eritrean Government severely restricts freedom of religion for groups that it has not registered, and infringes 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 institutions: 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. The government also intervened in procedural and administrative decisions of the Eritrean Orthodox Church by displacing 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. Some religious detainees were held in harsh conditions that included extreme temperature fluctuations with limited or no access to family.

India

The Indian constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice. While the national government took positive steps in key areas to improve religious freedom, the status of religious freedom generally remained the same during the period covered by this report. The United Progressive Alliance government continued to implement a platform based on respect for secular government and religious tolerance. The vast majority of Indians of every religious faith lived in peaceful coexistence. However, some extremists continued to perceive ineffective prosecution of attacks on religious minorities, particularly at the state and local level, as a signal that they could commit such violence with impunity. Religious conversion remained a highly contentious issue and terrorists continued deadly violence against religious targets. The national government reacted in a swift manner to rein in Hindu extremists, prevent revenge attacks and reprisal, and assure the Muslim community of its safety. In March 2006, the government of Rajasthan passed an anti-conversion bill, but it had not been approved by the governor by the end of the period covered by this report, and awaited presidential review. In August 2005, the Nanavati commission, tasked with conducting a re-inquiry into the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, released its report, citing several prominent Congress Party leaders for complicity in the violence, implicating law enforcement personnel in the deaths, and setting up committees to dispense compensation for victims' families. In response to a supreme court mandate, in February 2006, the Gujarat police stated that it would reinvestigate 1600 of the approximately 2,000 cases that were filed and closed in 2002.

Iran

There was a further 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 who do not practice Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'a Islam. Government-controlled media, including broadcasting and print, intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities, particularly the Baha'is, following the June 2005 election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. There were reports of imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs. 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. On November 22, 2005, unidentified persons killed a man who had converted to Christianity more than 10 years earlier. Reportedly, his death was followed by repression of and threats to other Christians, including arrests of 10 Christians. 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.) Government restrictions on Sufi Muslim groups and houses of worship also became more pronounced during the year covered by this report, and Sufis reported the constant harassment and intimidation of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services. Although laws governing Sufi practice are ambiguous, there are reports that the government called for a full ban on the practice of Sufism.

Israel and Occupied Territories

Israeli law provides for freedom of worship, and the Israeli Government generally respects this right. In response to terrorist attacks in the Occupied Territories, Israel's strict closure policies frequently had the effect of restricting the ability of Palestinians to reach places of worship and practice their religions. The violence that has persisted since the beginning of the second Intifada, or uprising, in 2000 has significantly curtailed religious practice in many areas of the Occupied Territories and caused damage to places of worship and religious shrines there. The construction of a separation barrier by the Government of Israel also limited access to sacred sites, and seriously impeded the work of religious organizations that provide humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians. Such impediments were not exclusive to religious believers or to religious organizations, and at times the government made efforts to lessen the impact on religious communities. The Government of Israel confiscated land (usually offering limited compensation, which churches did not accept) belonging to several religious institutions to build the barrier. Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), took steps to

eliminate religious incitement, although incidents of such incitement still occurred. The Basic Law approved by the PA states that the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law) are "the main source of legislation." The strong correlation between religion, ethnicity, and politics in the Occupied Territories at times imbues the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a religious dimension. Rhetoric by Palestinian terrorist groups included expressions of anti-Semitism. Some Muslim religious leaders preached sermons on the official PA television station that also included expressions of anti-Semitism. However, on October 28, 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." In the midst of growing chaos and lawlessness in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, there were credible reports in previous years that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with members of gangs to seize land from Christians. While there were no reports of Christians being targeted for extortion or abuse during the period covered by this report, the PA did not take action to investigate past injustices allegedly perpetrated by PA officials. Within Israel, problems continued to exist stemming primarily from the unequal treatment of religious minorities, and from the state's recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning Jews. Relations among religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and Christians, secular and religious Jews, and among the different streams of Judaism—often were strained, and institutional, legal, and societal discrimination persisted against the country's Arab citizens.

Laos

In some areas, authorities continued to display intolerance for minority religious practice, especially by evangelical Christians. Christians were detained and arrested, or told to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages. In early 2006, a village chief in Oudomsai Province confiscated the land of several Christian families. A Christian in Salavan Province has been under house arrest since April 1, 2006, for refusing to renounce his faith. A group of displaced ethnic Hmong minors, sent over the border by Thai authorities, has been detained in Bolikhamsai Province since December 2005; some sources indicated that the Hmong were Christians and may have been detained in Laos in part due to their religious affiliation. Also in late 2005, village officials burned a Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) in Bokeo Province and six church leaders were arrested; five of the six were later released, but the other died after being transferred from jail to a military hospital. Conflicts between ethnic groups sometimes exacerbated religious tensions.

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 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 church services appeared staged and contained political content supportive of the regime. Outsiders have limited ability to ascertain the level of government control over these groups, but it is generally assumed they are monitored closely. Defector reports continued to allege that they witnessed the arrests and execution of members of underground Christian churches by the regime in prior years. There is no reliable information on the number of religious detainees or prisoners, but there are unconfirmed reports that many people are detained for their religious beliefs and activities. Prison conditions are harsh; starvation and forced labor are common.

Pakistan

The country is an Islamic Republic. Islam is the state religion and the constitution requires that laws be consistent with it. 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 a different faith fostered religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities. The Ahmadiyya community continued to face legal bars to the practice of its faith. Anti-blasphemy laws provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting the religious feelings of any citizen. These laws are often used to intimidate reform-minded Muslims, sectarian opponents and religious minorities, or to settle personal scores. "Hudood Ordinances" impose elements of Qur'anic law on both Muslims and non-Muslims and dif-

ferent legal standards for men and women. Religious leaders, representing the country's six major Shi'a and Sunni groups, issued a religious injunction in May 2005 banning sectarian violence and the killing of non-Muslims. However, except for the Federally Administered Northern Areas, the sectarian violence situation remained unchanged, which led to more than 110 deaths during the reporting period. Under government pressure, many of the leaders of Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal, a coalition of Islamist political parties that leads the opposition in the national assembly, joined various interfaith efforts to promote religious tolerance. Anti-Ahmadi and anti-Semitic rhetoric continued unabated, although rhetoric against Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan was largely abandoned. The government worked with moderate religious leaders to organize programs on sectarian harmony and inter-faith understanding, maintained its ban on and actively attempted to curb the activities of sectarian and terrorist organizations, implemented a registration program for Islamic religious schools known as madrassahs, and continued with reform of the public education curriculum designed to end the teaching of religious intolerance. On July 1, 2006, President Musharraf instructed the Council on Islamic Ideology (CII) to prepare a revised Hudood Ordinance that eliminates discriminatory treatment of women and minorities not later than August 2006. In addition, the president ordered the release of all women detained under the current ordinance; according to local NGOs, approximately 700 women have been released.

Russia

The practice of religion was generally free for a significant majority of the population. However, some federal officials 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 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 during the reporting period. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats. 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. The Russian president and Government reacted quickly in condemning a January 2006 attack on a Moscow synagogue.

Saudi Arabia

Islam is the official religion, and the law requires that all citizens be Muslims. The government does not provide legal recognition or protection for freedom of religion, and it is severely restricted in practice. The public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited. As a matter of policy, the government confirmed that it guarantees and protects the right to private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious practice; however, this right is not always respected in practice and is not defined in law. During the reporting period, the government identified and confirmed its policies with regard to religious practice and tolerance in a number of key areas. The government continued a campaign against religious extremism, and top officials, including the king, continued to call for the promotion of tolerance. There were reports that some imams in their Friday sermons called for all citizens to show respect for other religious faiths, but denunciations from government-sanctioned pulpits of non-Muslim religions and the Shi'a branch of Islam were also reported. The government enforces a strictly conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam, and Muslims who do not adhere to it can face significant societal discrimination and serious repercussions at the hands of mutawwa'in (religious police, officially known as the Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice). Reports of harassment of non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims by mutawwa'in continued, including raids of private residences and detentions of non-Muslims for religious violations, such as possession of non-Muslim literature or holding non-Muslim worship services; however, there were fewer reports than last year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there was a decrease in both long-term and short-term detentions, and in arrests and deportations, of non-Muslims. However, there were also reports that mutawwa'in targeted several non-Muslim religious leaders and active

members of non-Muslim religious groups for arrest and deportation. Many non-Muslims continued to worship in fear of harassment and in such a manner as to avoid discovery by police or mutawwa'in. Members of the Shi'a minority continued to face political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including discrimination in employment, little representation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of mosques and community centers. However, the government made efforts to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religions and within Islam. In December 2005, King Abdullah hosted a ministerial summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), inaugurating it with a call for moderation, tolerance, rejection of extremist violence, and reform of educational programs (including textbooks and curricula). The government clarified that it will continue to revise educational materials to remove disparaging references to other religious traditions, and to retrain or remove imams whose preaching promotes extremist religious thought.

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 has been ongoing violent resistance by some Buddhists to Christian church activity, in particular that conducted by evangelical groups. There were sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and some societal tension due to ongoing allegations of forced conversions and debate on anti-conversion legislation.

Sudan

The 2005 Interim National Constitution provides for freedom of religion throughout the entire 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, signed on December 5, 2005, but the new Government of National Unity (GNU) continued to place restrictions on Christians in the North, particularly by denying building permits for new churches. 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 Interim National Constitution calls for the establishment of a Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the capital, Khartoum, to ensure that non-Muslims are not adversely affected by the application of Shari'a law there, but that had not taken place by the end of the period covered by this report. Relations among religious groups improved during the reporting period. Dialogue between Christian and Muslim groups continued under the auspices of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), a nongovernmental organization supported by the Government of National Unity, and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), comprising Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant groups. The SIRC supported peace and reconciliation efforts between Christians and Muslims, sponsoring a conference on the role of religious leaders in peace building with the U.S. Institute of Peace in July 2005.

Turkmenistan

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion, but in practice the government continued to monitor all forms of religious expression. However, the status of government respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. The government's Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) was more willing to assist minority religious groups in resolving conflicts with other government agencies. On October 20, 2005, several government agencies hosted a roundtable discussion with leaders of registered religious groups to discuss registration procedures for branch religious groups and other related concerns. During the reporting period, the Government of Turkmenistan introduced a temporary procedure for registering branches of registered religious groups located outside of the capital, Ashgabat. However, the procedure was not clear and the implementation by government officials was not consistent. The Government of

Turkmenistan limited the activities of unregistered religious congregations by prohibiting them from gathering publicly, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials. Government officials outside the capital often interpreted the law more strictly than those in Ashgabat. Although the level of harassment continued to decrease for registered religious groups, most unregistered groups continued to experience official harassment, including detention, arrest, confiscation of religious literature and materials, pressure to abandon religious beliefs, and threats of eviction and job loss. There were reports of abuse for religious belief or observance, and there were several accounts of persons being detained for questioning in connection with practicing their faith. To better facilitate government control of mosques, the Turkmen Government replaced a number of Sunni Muslim imams with individuals believed to be less independent in their interpretations of Islam.

Uzbekistan

There was a decline in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the government continued to restrict these rights in practice. The government permits the operation of approved Muslim groups, Jewish groups, the Russian Orthodox Church, and various other Christian denominations, such as Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Baptists. The law prohibits or severely restricts activities such as proselytizing, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering private religious instruction. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of a variety of Christian denominations, had difficulty satisfying the strict registration requirements set out by the law. There were several reports that Christian congregations were denied registration on spurious technical grounds. As in previous years, Protestant groups with ethnic Uzbek members reported operating in a climate of harassment and fear. Law enforcement officials raided and harassed some registered groups, several of which were de-registered and closed. 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. Many others were conservative Muslims whose beliefs or teachings differed from those of state-sanctioned clerics. The government pressured the banned Islamic group Akromiya (Akromiylar), especially in Tashkent and Andijon, with those actions spilling over into violence and deaths in Andijon in May 2005. A small but growing number of "underground" mosques operated under the close scrutiny of religious authorities and the security services. Mosques operating without registration are technically illegal and only operate with the indulgence of the local government.

Vietnam

Overall, respect for religious freedom in Vietnam improved during the period covered by this report. Both the constitution and law provide for freedom of worship; however, the government continued to restrict organized activities of religious groups that it declared to be at variance with State laws and policies. The government attempts to regulate religious practice through a legal framework, the foundation of which is the 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief, which requires that the government officially sanction the organization and activities of all religious denominations. A number of positive legal reforms adopted in recent years remained in the early stages of implementation. The 2005 implementation decree for the Ordinance delineates established guidelines for religious denominations to register their activities and seek official recognition. The 2005 "Instruction on Protestantism" promulgated by the prime minister directs officials to assist unrecognized Protestant denominations in registering their activities so that they can practice openly. The Instruction also calls on the Vietnamese Government to facilitate gathering for worship during the registration process. Protestant believers in the Central Highlands reported significant improvements in their situation. Furthermore, the government began to promote registration of Protestant house churches in northern Vietnam and the Northwest Highlands region, but progress was slow and the Vietnamese Government stated that only six previously unregistered northern congregations were allowed to legally register their activities during the reporting period. Despite several confirmed reports of police harassment and beatings of unregistered believers, Protestants across the north reported improvement in most officials' attitudes towards religious practice, and in general Protestants were allowed to gather for worship without significant harassment. Restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of some religious groups remained in place, and the Vietnamese Government maintained a prominent role in supervising recognized religions. Religious leaders encountered greatest restrictions when they engaged in activities that the government

perceived as political activism or a challenge to its rule. The Government of Vietnam continued to ban and actively discourage participation in one unrecognized faction of the Hoa Hao Buddhists. The government also actively restricted the leadership of the unrecognized United Buddhist Church of Vietnam and maintained that it will not recognize this organization under its current leadership. The Catholic Church reported that the government continued to ease restrictions on church assignment of new clergy but indicated that it would like to open additional seminaries in the North. During the period covered by this report, the government released four prominent prisoners viewed by various sources as having been imprisoned in connection with religious activities.

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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

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

Foreign-based 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 and secures their standing as officially registered denominations. Groups must provide general background information to register. In March 2004 the national assembly unanimously approved a law establishing stricter criteria for the registration of religious organizations. According to the new law, a religious group must have at least 100,000 adult adherents to qualify for registration. All eighty-five previously registered groups retained their registration and legal status, regardless of the number of members. At the end of the period covered by this report, more than 800 groups had pending applications. The Government did not shut down any religious groups with legal status during the period covered by this report, and no adverse action had been taken against groups with pending applications.

The Ministries of Justice and Culture recognize eighty-five denominations. There reportedly were more than 800 other religious organizations, many of which are Congolese- or Brazilian-based Christian evangelical groups that have not had action taken on their registration applications and were unlikely to meet the membership

requirement of at least 100,000 members to receive legal status. Colonial-era statutes banned all non-Christian religious groups from the country; although those statutes have not been repealed, they are no longer enforced. Religious groups have the right to civil registration.

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

Public schools in Angola do not require religious instruction. The Government permits religious organizations and missions to establish and operate schools. In 2004 some members of the small Lebanese Muslim community in Luanda complained that they had been thwarted in efforts to establish an Islamic community school.

The country's religious leaders have taken an active role in promoting the peace and national reconciliation process, and President dos Santos has consulted with them on constitutional and electoral issues as well as social and development issues. In June 2005 the ecumenical Inter-Church Committee for Peace in Angola and the Ministry of External Relations cosponsored a conference on peace and reconciliation. This conference was widely attended by government, religious, and civil society leaders and was an important interfaith effort between the Government and religious leaders to support national reconciliation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In March 2004 the Minister of Justice again publicly warned that the colonial-era law banning non-Christian religions, while not regularly enforced, remained the law and could be enforced against any radical religious groups advocating terrorism or public disturbances.

Members of the clergy regularly use their pulpits to criticize government policies. In 2003 government officials sharply criticized Catholic Church-owned Radio Ecclesia's call-in programs in which participants criticized the Government. However, Radio Ecclesia continued to broadcast these programs. In May 2004 President dos Santos stated publicly that Radio Ecclesia could operate nationwide. In April 2005 Radio Ecclesia's operators began taking steps to broadcast from five provincial capitals in addition to Luanda in order to meet the requirements of the new press law. The law, promulgated in May 2006, requires nonpublic radio networks to have provincial radio stations in order to broadcast nation-wide.

Seventeen religious groups remained banned 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. Members of these groups were not harassed, but two leaders were arrested for child abuse.

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

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

In March 2005 several lay members of the Catholic Church in Cabinda displayed banners protesting the nomination of a non-Cabindan as bishop during an Easter season Mass celebrated by the archbishop of Luanda. Police did not interfere with the protest but stepped in to protect the archbishop when protesters threw rocks at him as he left the cathedral in Cabinda. In August 2005 individuals in Cabinda continuing protests against the nomination of the new bishop assaulted a priest who had recently been appointed apostolic administrator for Cabinda. Following the detention of two priests in connection with the assault, Catholic priests in Cabinda stopped holding mass throughout the province. Services resumed in December 2005, and the new bishop of Cabinda peacefully assumed office in June 2006.

In February 2006 three mosques were closed for holding services that authorities claimed disrupted public order by impeding the flow of traffic. By the end of the reporting period, one of the three mosques had been reopened. Public attitudes toward Islam were generally negative, and these sentiments were evident in statements by government officials that opposed Muslim proselytizing and in public commentaries by citizens in the media. While religious intolerance could have been an aspect of these attitudes, many citizens cited cultural differences as the basis for

their negative views toward Islam. Muslim leaders submitted a second request for legal status in March 2006, since the first application submitted in 2004 was improperly prepared.

Governmental agencies and civil society organizations continued campaigns against traditional religions that involve shamans, employ animal sacrifices, or are identified as practicing witchcraft. There have been periodic reports of children being accused of witchcraft in some poor, 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. Established church groups have organized education campaigns to combat these practices. 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 and official visitors from the United States routinely meet with the country's religious leaders in the context of peacekeeping, democratization, development, and humanitarian relief efforts. Church groups are key members of the country's civil society. 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.

The U.S. government provided financial support to Radio Ecclesia to increase its public affairs and news programming as an independent alternative source of information for citizens. In addition, the embassy funded dissemination of human and civil rights information through an ecumenical newsletter network.

BENIN

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 43,483 square miles and a population of approximately 6.8 million. According to the 2002 census, 27.1 percent of the population was 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 religions, 1.9 percent other religions, and 6.5 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

Many individuals who nominally identified themselves as Christian or Muslim also practiced traditional indigenous religions. Among the most commonly practiced was the animist Vodun system of belief, also commonly known as voodoo, which originated in this area of Africa. There were few atheists.

More than half of all Christians were Roman Catholic. Other religious groups, both Christian and non-Christian, included 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 adhered to the Sunni branch of Islam. The few Shi'a Muslims were primarily Middle Eastern expatriates.

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 has ruled in several cases that it is unconstitutional to block the access of any group to its religious services. In November 2004, the court ruled that religious groups could not deny access to public properties or facilities to other groups because such denial of access violated the constitutional principle of secularism. In this case, the chief priest of a Vodun group had tried to claim possession of a lake as religious property and refused other groups, including evangelical Christians, access to it.

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

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

Persons who wish to form a religious group must register with the Ministry of the Interior. Registration requirements are the same for all religious groups, and there were no reports that any group 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 religious leaders of all faiths by attending their induction ceremonies, funerals, and other religious celebrations. The president regularly received religious leaders of all faiths, and police forces were assigned to provide security to any religious event upon request.

Missionary groups operated freely throughout the country.

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 also were Christian and Muslim and tolerant of other religions.

Ecumenical Day has been celebrated every first Wednesday of May for the past thirty-seven years 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.

SECTION IV. U.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 attend ceremonies associated with various faiths, often attended by government representatives as well, and stress in their public remarks the value and importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The embassy sent two religious scholars to the United States as participants in the International Visitor's Program "United States Political Process for Emerging Muslim Leaders."

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 224,710 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.76 million. An estimated 70 percent of the country's citizens identified themselves as Christians. Anglicans, Methodists, and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, formerly the London Missionary Society, claimed the majority of Christians. There were 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. In recent years, the number of new religious groups, some of West African origin, increased; these churches have begun holding services and drawing substantial crowds with a charismatic blend of Christianity and traditional indigenous religions. According to the most recent census (2001), the country's Muslim community, primarily of South Asian origin, numbered just over 5,000. The 2001 census also listed approximately 3,000 Hindus and 700 Baha'is. Members of each community estimated that these figures significantly understated their respective numbers. Approximately 20 percent of citizens espoused no religion.

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 religions 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 within the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. After a generally simple but slow bureaucratic process, the organization is registered. There are no legal benefits for registered organizations, although an organization must be registered before it can conduct business, sign contracts, or open an account in a local bank. Any person who holds an official position in, manages, or assists in the management of an unregistered orga-

nization is liable to a fine of up to $188 (P1,000) and/or up to seven years in prison. Any member of an unregistered society is liable to penalties including fines up to $94 (P500) and/or up to three years in prison. Ninety-four religious organizations registered from July 2005 to May 2006. No religious organization was deregistered during that period. In this time frame, 114 religious groups started the process of registration, but their applications were terminated after they failed to submit the required application forms, constitution, and fees within ninety days.

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

There are no laws against proselytizism.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The constitution provides for the suspension of religious freedom in the interests of national defense, public safety, public order, public morality, or public health. However, any suspension of religious freedom by the Government must be deemed "reasonably justifiable in a democratic society."

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

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

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no indications of tension between Muslim and other religious 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. 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 105,689 square miles, and its population is approximately 13.1 million. While exact statistics on religious affiliation were not available and varied widely according to a source, the Government estimated in its most recent census (1996) that approximately 60 percent of the population practiced Islam, the majority of whom belonged to the Sunni branch of Islam, while remaining minorities adhered to the Shi'a, Tidjania, or Wahhabi branches. The Government also

estimated that 16.6 percent of the population practiced Roman Catholicism, approximately 3 percent were members of various Protestant denominations, and 23.7 percent exclusively or principally maintained traditional indigenous beliefs.

Statistics on religious affiliation were approximate because syncretistic beliefs and practices were widespread among both Christians and Muslims, many of whom incorporated indigenous beliefs and traditions into their practices. Additionally, the majority of citizens practiced traditional indigenous religions to varying degrees, and strict adherence to Christian and Muslim beliefs was often nominal. Almost all citizens were believers in a supernatural order, making atheism virtually nonexistent.

Muslims were concentrated largely around the northern, eastern, and western borders, while Christians were concentrated in the center of the country. Traditional religious practices were commonly found throughout the country, especially in rural communities. Ouagadougou, the capital, had a mixed Muslim and Christian population; however, Bobo-Dioulasso, the country's second largest city, was mostly Muslim. Small Syrian and Lebanese immigrant communities, found in the two main cities of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, were overwhelmingly (more than 90 percent) Christian.

There were more than sixty different ethnicities in the country. Members of the dominant ethnic group, the Mossi, belonged to all three major religious groups (Christian, Muslim, and animist), while Fulani and Dioula communities were overwhelmingly Muslim. Smaller groups, such as the Lobi, were religiously heterogeneous as well.

Generally, there was little correlation between religion and political affiliation or economic status. Government officials belonged to all of the major religions, and religious affiliation appeared unrelated to membership in the ruling party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress, or any other political party.

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

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. Islam, Christianity, and traditional indigenous religions 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 faith was not known to confer any advantage or disadvantage in the political arena, the civil service, the military, or the private sector.

The Government has established the following religious 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. There was no evidence that these holidays had a negative effect on any religious group.

All organizations, religious or otherwise, were required 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). All religious groups were given equal access to registration, which the Government routinely approved. Religious groups are taxed 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; this has never occurred. 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 operated under the same regulatory framework for publishing and broadcasting rights as other entities. Once a broadcast license is granted, for example, the Government regulates the operation of religious radio stations

in accordance with the same rules that apply to commercial and state-run stations. 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, there were no special tax preferences granted to religious organizations operating print or broadcast media.

Foreign missionary groups also operated freely and faced few, if any, restrictions. The Government neither forbade missionaries from entering the country nor restricted their activities; however, missionary groups occasionally faced complicated bureaucratic procedures in pursuit of particular activities.

Religious instruction was not offered in public schools; rather, it was limited to private schools and to the home. Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups operated primary and secondary schools. A total of 18 percent of elementary school students attended religious schools in the 2005–06 academic year, while 13 percent of secondary school students attended religious schools during the same period. Although school officials had to submit the names of their directors to the Government and register their schools, religious or otherwise, the Government was never involved in appointing or approving these officials.

The Government did not fund any religious schools. Unlike other private schools, religious schools were not required to pay taxes unless they conducted for-profit activities. The Government reviewed the curriculum of such schools to ensure that religiously oriented schools offered the full standard academic curriculum found in all other schools. The Government, however, did 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. In contrast with the previous report, there were no new reports that individuals were imprisoned or detained for refusing to allow their children to be inoculated against polio and measles on the grounds of religion. Residents of the village of Dar el Assane who had been arrested for resisting a national vaccination campaign in 2004 were released in early 2005 by law enforcement authorities. The Government did not follow through on the threat to charge them with child endangerment.

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

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

The Ministry of Social Action and National Solidarity maintained a shelter in Ouagadougou for women forced to flee their villages because they were accused of being witches. Similar shelters financed by nongovernmental and religious organizations were also located in Ouagadougou.

During the period covered by this report, the World Health Organization and the National Committee for the Fight Against Excision reported that some persons in the country were performing female genital mutilation (FGM) on young girls in violation of the 1996 anti-FGM law forbidding the practice, which was considered by some Muslims to be a religious activity. Sometimes those persons used baptismal ceremonies as a cover for the mutilation because the baby was expected to cry during the ceremony.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. embassy and different Islamic organizations co-sponsored a number of workshops and public events discussing religious tolerance in the United States and promoting its continued practice locally. Activities also included a summer camp focusing on tolerance for children attending Qur'anic schools 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 and provided scholarships to sixty Muslims students to learn English at the American Language Center. 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 religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution, promulgated on March 18, 2005, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 Catholic Church, which represents approximately 60 percent of the population, is predominant.

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

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

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

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

The Government recognizes Catholic holy days, including the Assumption, the Ascension, All Saints' Day, and Christmas. In 2005 the Government also officially recognized the Muslim holy day Eid al-Fitr.

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.

On June 16, 2005 members of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL killed five civilians taking part in a religious service in Bujumbura Rural Province, and at least ten persons were wounded by grenades and gunfire.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials also maintain regular contact with leaders and members of various religious communities. The embassy has supported Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups in the fields of health, education, and conflict resolution. It appears that the program has been instrumental in resolving disputes within religious communities, the latest illustration being elections to choose the Burundian Muslim spiritual leader. 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The overall amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a few incidents of religious discrimination by private actors. In addition, some religious groups face societal pressure and discrimination within their regions. This reflects ethnic more than religious differences.

In general, persons of different religions cohabitate peacefully in the country. The country is 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 a total area of 183,568 square miles, and its population is approximately 16.5 million. Muslim centers and Christian churches of various denominations operated freely throughout the country. Approximately 40 percent of the population was at least nominally Christian, approximately 20 percent was at least nominally Muslim, and approximately 40 percent practiced traditional indigenous religions or no religion. The Christian population was divided approximately equally between Catholic and Protestant denominations.

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

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

Christian and Muslim religious holidays are celebrated as national holidays. These include Good Friday (Christian), Ascension Day (Christian), Assumption Day (Christian), Christmas Day (Christian), the Feast of the Lamb (Muslim), and the End of Ramadan (Muslim).

The Law on Religious Congregations governs relations between the Government and religious groups. Religious groups must be approved by and registered with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINAT) to function legally. There were no reports that the Government refused to register any group; however, the process can take a number of years. It is illegal for a religious group to operate without official recognition, but the law prescribes no specific penalties. This is evidenced by the proliferation within the major cities of what persons call sects, but which their leaders claim are subgroups of some Protestant denominations. Few of those 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 fulfill the legal requirement to qualify as a religious congregation. This definition includes "any group of natural persons or corporate bodies whose vocation is divine worship" or "any group of persons living in community in accordance with a religious doctrine." The denomination then submits a file to the MINAT. The file must include a request for authorization, a copy of the group's charter describing planned activities, and the names and respective functions of the group's officials. The minister reviews the file and sends it to the presidency with a recommendation for a positive or negative decision. The president generally follows the recommendation of the minister, and authorization is granted by a presidential decree. The approval process may take up to several years, due primarily to administrative delays.

The only religious groups known to be registered are Christian and Muslim groups and the Baha'i Faith. According to MINAT statistics released in 2002, there

are 38 officially registered denominations, most of which are Christian. There also are numerous unregistered small religious groups that operate illegally but freely. The Government does not register traditional religious groups, stating that the practice of traditional religion is a private concern observed by members of a particular ethnic or kinship group or the residents of a particular locality.

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

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

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

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some religious groups faced societal pressures within their regions. In the northern provinces, especially in rural areas, societal discrimination by Muslims against Christians and persons who practice traditional indigenous religions continued.

In May 2004 a group of Muslim radicals circulated anti-Christian tracts in the North, Far North, and Adamaoua provinces. Both Muslim and Christian religious leaders in the area reacted quickly to identify the source of the tracts and encourage their congregations to respect religious diversity and promote religious tolerance. In April 2005 the Garoua assistant subdivisional officer reported that a meeting with all the religious groups had been held the week before to discuss extremism in the area. The group reiterated their previous statement, asserting that it was nonresidents who circulated the extremist pamphlets. In early 2006 the Garoua subdivisional officer stated that the Government could not identify the source of the pamphlets, thus confirming primary perception that it was nonresident activists who disseminated them.

In 2003 a Catholic Church official in the Far North Province reported that Muslim "fundamentalists" who trained in Pakistan and Sudan were jeopardizing the usually good relationship between Muslims and Christians in the region. According to the official, these fundamentalists were gaining support, particularly among the youth, because of the high levels of poverty and unemployment in the northern provinces. While the official did not believe that fundamentalism had caused serious problems in the region, he recognized that relations between religious groups could deteriorate if the economic situation remains poor. The official also mentioned that some Christian groups were aggressively working to convert Muslims in the region. There was no reported deterioration of relations between religious groups.

In May 2004 Pastor Alombah Godlove was reportedly beaten and fined by the traditional ruler, or Fon, of his village for providing a Christian burial for a village elder in accordance with the deceased's will. The Fon believed that the elder, who was also a member of a traditional religious secret society, should have been buried with traditional rites. At the end of the period covered by this report, the case was under investigation by the National Commission on Human Rights. There was no further development in this case, as Pastor Alombah Godlove did not sue his traditional ruler.

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

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

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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In 2004 the U.S. embassy organized a panel discussion on "Islam and Religious Tolerance," excerpts of which were aired during two editions of the weekly television program "Understanding Islam." Approximately 500 copies of the pamphlet "Muslim Life in America" were distributed to Muslim leaders throughout the country. The embassy also provided regular assistance to the American missionary community and consular repatriation services to American citizens in a case of forced religious conversion. Additionally, the ambassador and other staff members reached out to the Rain Forest International

School (RFIS), a Yaounde school predominately serving the Protestant missionary community.

Another grant was given to support the creation of the Federation of Muslim Women in Cameroon that enabled the organization to host a nation-wide conference that brought together Muslim women from all ten of the provinces. The embassy worked closely with the local imams to ensure they had an opportunity to take advantage of Voice of America's new Islamic channel.

Embassy officials met on several occasions with the Catholic archbishop of Douala, Christian Cardinal Tumi, to discuss various issues including religious freedom, human rights, freedom of the press, and the democratization process. Embassy officials 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 ten provinces, embassy officials continued to meet with local religious officials to discuss any problems with government officials or individuals belonging to other faiths and denominations.

CAPE VERDE

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

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

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 new penal code, which entered into force in July 2004, states that violations of religious freedom are a crime subject to a penalty of between three months' and three 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 holi-

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The 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.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, certain groups adhering to traditional practices continued to be targets for societal violence.

The U.S. government 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 approximately 4 million, of which an estimated 690,000 live in the capital, Bangui. An estimated 50 percent of the population was Christian, and approximately 20 percent was Muslim. The remainder of the population, approximately 30 percent, practiced traditional indigenous religions or no religion at all.

The Government does not keep data on the number of nontraditional religious groups in the country, and there was no data available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals; however, most Christians were believed to prac-

tice some aspects of traditional indigenous religions. Additionally, there was anecdotal evidence which suggested an increase in conversions to Islam by younger persons.

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

There were many missionary groups operating in the country, including the Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, Grace Brethren, and Jehovah's Witnesses. While these missionaries were predominantly from the Unites States, France, Italy, and Spain, many also came from Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other African countries. 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 during the reporting period.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The November 2004 constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally permitted adherents of all religions to worship without interference; however, 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 was not supported by any additional legislation.

There is no state religion, and there was no indication that the Government favored any particular religion. Religious organizations and missionary groups were free to proselytize and worship throughout the country; however, the practice of witchcraft or sorcery continued to be a criminal offense.

Witchcraft or sorcery is a criminal offense under the penal code, punishable by execution. Although no one accused of witchcraft received the death penalty during the reporting period, numerous individuals were arrested for these practices throughout the year—often in conjunction with some other offense, such as murder. Authorities stated that police often arrested and detained persons accused of witchcraft or sorcery to protect them from societal violence aimed against them within their communities.

Most individuals convicted of sorcery received sentences of one to five years in prison; they can also be fined up to $1,500 (817,836 CFA francs). During a typical trial of someone accused of sorcery, traditional doctors were called to give their opinion of the suspect's ties to sorcery. "Truth herbs" were used to make a suspect "confess." Neighbors were called as witnesses, and because spells were believed to involve burying bits of clothing, sample cuttings of clothes were brought before the jury as evidence. Police and gendarmes conducted investigations into witchcraft, and according to the minister of justice, investigations into allegations of sorcery were difficult.

Bangui prison officials estimated that 50 to 60 percent of women detainees were arrested in connection with charges of sorcery or witchcraft. On September 20, 2005, for example, Bangui's Bimbo prison for women held forty-four women. The general prosecutor later reported that approximately twenty-three of the women, in addition to fourteen men in the Ngaragba men's prison, were arrested and detained for offenses in connection to witchcraft; of these, five men and four women were sentenced, and the others were liberated for lack of evidence of their crime.

In 2005 a sixty-year old man was arrested for the killing of a twenty-four-year old man, whom he accused of having an affair with his wife, after the victim's family pressed charges against him. According to the criminal court, the plaintiff used sorcery to commit the killing and consequently was found guilty of a criminal offense. He was sentenced to ten years in jail after pleading guilty to his crime.

The Government celebrated several Christian holy days as national holidays including Christmas, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, the Monday after Pentecost, and All Saints' Day. The Government did not officially celebrate Islamic holy days; however, Muslims were allowed to take these days off from work.

Religious groups (except for traditional indigenous religious groups) were 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 which failed to register; however, the police did not attempt to impose any penalty on such groups.

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

According to the Government and nongovernmental organizations, participation in religious education was not forced or required of students and students were free

to attend any religious program of their choosing. Although the Government did not explicitly prohibit religious instruction in public schools, such instruction was not part of the overall public school curriculum; nor was it common. Religious instruction was permitted without government interference in private schools. Private Catholic schools, of which there were twelve in Bangui, generally included one hour of religious education per week.

The Government granted religious groups one day each week, of their choosing, to make free broadcasts on the official radio station. All religious representatives that wished to broadcast on public airwaves were required to pay a fee when covering certain activities or making religious advertisements. There were three religious broadcasting stations—two protestant and one Catholic.

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. President Francois Bozize continued to be involved in religious activities and maintained close ties with a range of religious leaders in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion, any religious or nonreligious group that the Government considered subversive, a term not specifically defined by the Government, was 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. For example, 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. The Ministry of Interior may also intervene in religious organizations to resolve internal conflicts about property, finances, or leadership within religious groups. Under this framework, the Ministry of the Interior indefinitely closed a Protestant church in Bangui at the end of March 2006 after authorities were notified that two factions within the church were planning to fight each other with knives. Government authorities declared the closure was necessary to prevent violence until tensions subsided. Police made no arrests, and the church remained closed at the end of the reporting period. The Government imposed no other sanctions on any religious groups during the period covered by this report.

Unlike in previous years, the Government did not attempt to suspend or interfere with the activities of religious institutions operating within its legal framework; however, it maintained legal requirements which restricted the activities of some groups. According to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, several of the thirty-four Protestant churches whose activities were suspended by the Government in 2003 (for supposedly being created without regard for official rules and regulations) had fulfilled government requirements to reopen and had resumed their activities by the end of the reporting period. To reopen, these religious institutions had to prove they had a minimum of one thousand members. Additionally, church leaders had to present evidence that they graduated from what the Government considered high caliber religious schools and provide documentation proving that the church was created with respect to local law. A few of these churches did not reopen for failure to meet these requirements. Some observers perceived this decree as an attempt by the Government to regulate the proliferation of places of worship, which had become a trend in the country and a source of concern for the Government over recent years.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, the killing and injuring of suspected sorcerers or witches continued.

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 religions include or accommodate belief in the efficacy of witchcraft, they generally only approve of harmful witchcraft for defensive or retaliatory purposes. It has traditionally been used as a common explanation for diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, for which the causes were unknown.

In June 2005 seven residents of Bangui's Miskine suburb killed a woman they accused of being a witch. No additional information regarding this case was available at the end of the reporting period. 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. In response to political and military unrest in the country, the embassy suspended its operations from November 2002 through December 2004. It partially reopened in January 2005 with the arrival of a charge d'affaires and resumed the monitoring of political and human rights developments in the country, despite having only a limited diplomatic presence in the country.

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

The different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, although some tensions across 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 approximately 9 million. Of the total population, more than half were Muslim, approximately one-third were Christian, and the remainder practiced traditional indigenous religions or no religion at all. Most northerners practiced Islam, and many southerners practiced Christianity or a traditional indigenous religion; however, population patterns were becoming more complex, especially in urban areas, and anecdotal evidence indicated that Muslim conversion was on the rise in areas that were previously Christian or animist. Many citizens, despite having stated religious affiliations, did not practice their religion regularly.

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

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

There were foreign missionaries representing both Christian and Islamic groups. Itinerant Muslim preachers primarily from Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, also visited. Saudi Arabian funding generally supported social and educational projects and extensive mosque construction.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for religious freedom; however, at times government practices limited this right. The constitution also provides that the country shall be a secular state; however, a large portion of senior government officials were Muslim, and some policies favor Islam in practice. For example, under a recent decree, a government commission was made responsible for organizing the Hajj and the Umra.

The Hajj is organized by a committee composed of members of the High Council for Islamic Affairs, headed by the Grand Imam, and the Directorate of Religious Affairs, in the Ministry of the Interior. Through these channels, the Government and

High Council for Islamic Affairs have direct and close contacts with Saudi officials throughout the organizing period each year. Additionally, government journalists are often sponsored by the Government to cover the event in Mecca.

In addition to organizing the Hajj and the Umra, the Government annually sponsors Hajj trips to Mecca for certain officials. In February 2006 the Association of Evangelical Churches sent a memorandum to the Government criticizing this and other practices as eroding the traditionally secular stance of the country; however, the Government did not respond to the memorandum.

While the Government is legally obligated to treat all faiths or denominations equally, Islamic congregations continued to be viewed as having preferential status, particularly when requesting official clearance or permission for certain activities.

Non-Muslim religious leaders also claimed that Muslim officials and organizations received greater support from the Government. In the past, the Government reportedly accorded public lands to Muslim leaders for the purpose of building mosques, while representatives of other faiths were required to purchase land at market rates to build places of worship.

Religious matters are overseen by the director of religious and traditional affairs. Working under the minister of the interior, the director of religious and traditional affairs is responsible for arbitrating inter-communal 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 in the country, including the supervision of Arabic language schools and higher institutions, the representation of the country in international Islamic meetings, and coordination of the Hajj.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs, in coordination with the country's 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 (a regional Muslim leader) and serves as head of the council.

When President Deby came to power in 1990, he dissolved the former High Council for Islamic Affairs, formed a new council, and appointed the current grand imam, Sheikh Hassan Hissein Abakar, a representative of the generally moderate Sufi (Tijaniyah) branch of Islam. 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. Viewed as a generally moderate, pro-Western religious figure, Grand Imam Abakar 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.

In addition to religious matters, 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 three years. In 2004 the Muslim representative handed responsibilities over to a Catholic priest designated by the Christian community.

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. Since 2004 registration has taken place without discrimination and been interpreted as official recognition. Despite popular perceptions to the contrary, registration is not intended to confer tax preferences or other benefits to religious groups.

Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries continued to proselytize in the country. 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 authorization was withheld from any group.

Religious instruction is prohibited in public schools; however, all religious groups were permitted 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 believed to be financed by Arab donors (governments, NGOs, and individuals), particularly from Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia. Egypt also provided a number of Egyptian teachers for Islamic educational institutions operating at the high school and university level in N'djamena and Abeche. Libya was also known to financially support teachers at Qur'anic and Arab-language schools throughout the country.

Among the numerous private radio stations, several stations broadcasting throughout the country were owned by religious organizations (six Christian and two Islamic). Radio stations run by both nonprofit and commercial groups were subject to close official scrutiny.

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.

While most interfaith dialogue takes place on a voluntary basis and not through government intervention, the Government was generally supportive of these initiatives.

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 group arrived in the country from Nigeria and Senegal and incorporates singing and dancing into its religious ceremonies and activities. Male and female members of the group freely interact with one another during religious gatherings. The 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. The minister of interior banned the group in 1998 and again in 2001. The 2001 ban (which was implemented on the technical grounds that the group did not have by-laws or basic statutes) denied the group's registration request and led to Al Faid al-Djaria's filing of a case against the Government. During this reporting period, the ban on Al Faid al-Djaria continued as the group's case continued in court, and the group carried out activities in the Chari Baguirmi region of the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Several human rights organizations reported on the problem of the mahadjirin children. Qur'anic teachers force these children, who attended certain Islamic schools, to beg for food and money. There were no credible estimates as to the number of mahadjirin children; however, UNICEF included these children in its child protection efforts. In September 2005 French television broadcast a program on the situation of the mahadjirin children, who testified in one case that they were chained and beaten. After this broadcast, 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 these attempted reforms, the schools remained open during the reporting period.

The Government also remained concerned about some Islamic organizations, such as the Wahhabist 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 prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

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 ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Although the different religious communities generally coexisted without problems, there was occasional tension between Christians and Muslims as well as between more fundamentalist and more moderate Muslims. During the year there were regular meetings between key religious leaders to discuss peaceful collaboration among their groups.

The publication of Danish cartoons depicting Muhammad had a particularly negative impact on Muslim-Christian relations in the country. On February 11, 2006, the president of the High Council for Islamic Affairs led a demonstration of several thousand Muslims to protest the publication, by a Danish newspaper, of caricatures of Muhammad perceived as derogatory and blasphemous. While the demonstration was intended to be peaceful, some demonstrators damaged a school and bookstore belonging to a Catholic Church, attacked an expatriate evangelical missionary, and burned her vehicle. The Catholic Church and Association of Evangelical Churches sent official protests to the Government for their failure to respond to the situation; however, they received no official response.

Muslim citizens appealed to the Government, asking it to ban all newspapers and press releases insulting Islam and Mohammed. Some Muslims also recommended sanctions against Denmark. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had not offered a response to Muslims' requests or made a public statement regarding its stance on the issue.

The marketplace violence in the southern town of Bebedja between Christians and Muslims that resulted in twelve dead and twenty-one wounded in 2004 remained a source of tension among the local populace. At the end of the reporting period, some of the twenty suspects originally detained were still in prison awaiting trial. Some victims contacted by human rights groups have accused the Government of failing to investigate the cases thoroughly and conduct proper trials.

There were reports of tensions within the Muslim community between the High Council for Islamic Affairs and radical elements within the community. Such tensions arose from differences between the leading Tijaniyahs and more fundamentalist groups regarding interpretations of proper practices, preaching, and the leading of prayers. Each group considered its interpretation of the Qur'an to be correct in terms of Islamic practices and teachings and contested other interpretations of Islam.

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. While these dialogues were usually initiated by the Commission for Peace and Justice, a Catholic organization, both Christian and non-Christian groups participated.

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. embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In the period covered by this report, the ambassador met regularly with senior representatives of the Muslim and Christian faiths. In May 2006, for example, the ambassador traveled to Eastern Chad where he visited the high imam of Abeche and the sultan of Ouaddai, two of the most prominent and recently vested Muslim leaders in the country. During his visit, the ambassador described the embassy's outreach programs to the country's Muslims as a means for facilitating greater collaboration with the Muslim community. Additionally, the ambassador discussed the ongoing political instability in the region and requested the leaders' interpretation of the situation while emphasizing the U.S. government's desire to find a lasting peace for Sudan and its neighbors.

Embassy officers also meet with various religious leaders and groups during travel outside of the capital. Embassy officials, for example, attended the closing ceremony of a five-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 seminar was organized by the Islamic Association for Justice, a local nongovernmental organization, and trained approximately thirty religious leaders on topics such as religious freedom, women's rights, educational equality, and the 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.

Embassy relations with Muslim communities were also strengthened by the participation of Muslim leaders in the U.S. government's International Visitor Program. 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. Participants in the program included prominent Muslims such as the sultan of Abéché, the director of Radio Al Qur'an (a Muslim radio station owned by the High Council of Islamic affairs), and the principal of Ibnu Cina High School, a well-known Muslim school in the country.

UNION OF COMOROS

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government continued to infringe upon this right.

There was no change in the status of the respect for religious freedom, which is sometimes limited, during the period covered by this report. Approximately 99 percent of the population was Muslim, and an overwhelming majority were Sunni. There was no sharp divide between Sunni and Shi'a, and most Muslims respected the doctrinal differences between the two branches of Islam. Government authorities continued to prohibit Christians from proselytizing; however, there were no known instances where the local authorities and population restricted the right of Christians to practice other aspects of their faith.

There is widespread societal discrimination against Christians in all sectors of 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 838 square miles, and its population is approximately 635,000. An overwhelming majority—approximately 99 percent—of the population was Sunni Muslim. Foreigners living on the islands numbered several hundred, and included Hindus, Jehovah's Witnesses, or members of various Christian, Catholics, and Protestants. A few foreign religious groups maintained humanitarian programs in the country, but by agreement with the Government, they did not engage in proselytizing.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The 2002 constitution, reincorporates Ndzuwani (Anjouan), Ngazidja (Grand Comore), and Moheli into a new federation that grants the islands greater autonomy. It specifically provides for freedom of religion; however, the constitution states that citizens will draw principles and rules that will govern the country from Muslim religious tenets. While the constitution does not proclaim Islam as the official religion, government authorities continued to prohibit Christians from proselytizing.

A law dating from the early 1980s states "whoever divulges, promotes, or teaches Muslims a religion other than Islam will be punished with a three-month prison sentence and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 Comoran Francs."

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

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

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

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

On May 29, 2006, four men were convicted to three months in prison for "evangelizing Muslims." One woman was also convicted but received a three-month suspended sentence. They had been arrested one week earlier for hosting Christian religious debates in a private residence.

In February 2006 the International Church of Moroni received permission to distribute gift boxes of toys for Comoran children. After promising the boxes would not contain any Bibles or religious literature, the church distributed boxes in four villages, two schools, and two hospitals. On March 27, the minister of education demanded to meet with the pastor of the International Church. During the meeting the minister revealed that a children's Bible storybook and two necklaces with crosses were found during the toy distribution. The minister demanded that the church stop all gift distribution; the church complied. On April 1, one of the church leaders was arrested for his involvement in toy distribution. He spent one night in prison, and his house was searched. Other church leaders were similarly detained, and their houses were searched. On April 3, the ministers of interior and education met with the pastor and threatened to have him expelled from the country. The school directors that gave permission for the boxes to be distributed were suspended and village leaders were questioned.

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

Officials in Moheli reportedly stopped a group traveling from Grand Comore to Anjouan via Moheli to attend a Jehovah's Witnesses meeting.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2004 the island government of Ndzuwani (Anjouan) arrested and shaved the beards of several participants who had participated in an unauthorized gathering of several hundred followers of the Djawula interpretation of Islam. They were then released.

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

There is concern that Islamic fundamentalism is increasing as young citizens return to the country after Islamic theological studies abroad and seek to impose a stricter adherence to Islamic religious law on their family members and associates. The Union Government has established a university, and government representatives stated that an important goal of the university is to give young citizens the option of pursuing university studies in the country instead of overseas where they might absorb more radical ideas. There were 2,450 students enrolled in the university, which provides classes in basic sciences and languages.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. An officer from the U.S. embassy in Madagascar met with religious leaders on the islands of Ndzuwani (Anjouan) and Ngazidja (Grand Comore) to discuss religious tolerance. A U.S. presidential delegation emphasized tolerance and nonviolence during a May 27, 2006, meeting with the newly elected president. In public and private, the new president professed moderate Islam and decried radicalism.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The new constitution, approved in a national referendum in December 2005 and formally adopted February 18, 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there continued to be credible reports that a number of children and elderly persons were accused of witchcraft and abandoned or abused by their families.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

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

Most religious groups were scattered throughout the country and were widely represented in cities and large towns. Muslims were mainly concentrated in the provinces of Maniema and Kinshasa. Members of the syncretistic religion Bunda dia Kongo resided predominately in Bas Congo.

Foreign missionaries operated freely within the country. Missionary groups included Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Baptists, Evangelical Christians, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, and Coptic (Orthodox) Christians.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 26 of the transitional constitution provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. During the period covered by this report, a new constitution that provides for the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion was passed by national referendum. There is no state religion.

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

Public schools permit religious instruction, and many public schools are operated by religious groups. 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 promoted interfaith understanding by supporting and consulting with the country's five major religious groups (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Islamic, and Kimbanguist). The Consortium of Traditional Religious Leaders serves as an informal forum for religious leaders to gather and discuss issues of concern.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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

During 2005, the Government banned all religious radio and television stations from broadcasting political and news programs.

On April 27, 2005, the High Media Authority (HAM) suspended religious television station Radio Tele Message de Vie for one month. The suspension followed the station's refusal to give the Government tape recordings of a call-in program broadcast between April 9 and 11 that allegedly "incited violence and rebellion." This particular program edition featured a taped message by Reverend Fernand Kuthino, the station's owner, who stated that the transitional government should transfer power to the citizenry on June 30, 2005.

This ban was revoked shortly after June 30, 2005, and religious radio and television stations operated normally. HAM may suspend stations, religious or secular, for hate speech and calls for ethnic violence.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

During the period covered by this report, there continued to be reports of incidents in which persons suspected of witchcraft were attacked, tortured, killed, or driven from their homes. There is a common belief in the region that some persons have the power to cast spells on others; this fear sometimes rises to mass hysteria. During the period covered by this report, there was an increase in reports that certain leaders of revival churches, or small evangelical Protestant churches, exploited the people's fear of witchcraft by either encouraging families to drive accused witches from their homes or performing costly and painful exorcisms in which victims may be locked in boxes for long periods of time, starved for several days, or receive other harsh treatment. Reliable estimates by international nongovernmental organizations working in the country suggest that up to 70 percent of homeless children were accused witches. No one was charged, prosecuted, or punished for such crimes reported in previous years or for crimes reported during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 132,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 4 million. Approximately half of its citizens were Christian; of these approximately 90 percent were Roman Catholic. Other denominations included Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses. There was a growing Muslim community in the country, estimated at 2 percent of the population. In fact, 2005 saw the construction of large new mosque in Brazzaville. Most workers in the urban centers were 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 were primarily Sunni Muslims. There was also a large Chadian Muslim population.

The remainder of the population was made up of practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, those who belonged to various messianic groups, and those who practiced no religion at all. A small minority of the Christian community practiced 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 persisted, its influence has diminished considerably since 2003.

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and 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, are required to register with and be approved by the Government. There were no reports of discrimination against religious groups in this process, although all admit that it is time-consuming and lengthy. Penalties for failure to register involve fines and potential confiscation of goods, invalidation of contracts, and deportation for foreigners, but no criminal penalties are applicable.

The Government recognizes the Christian 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.

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

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

The generally amicable relations among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Although uncommon, interreligious marriage was generally socially acceptable. Children of majority and minority religions 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 the rural areas. In some forest communities where there are pygmy populations, there is some discrimination against them in education and employment as well as intolerance for their social practices, including at times their animist religious practices.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. These discussions include highlighting the importance of religious freedom with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the presidency, nongovernmental organizations, and members of the national assembly. The U.S. embassy also has implemented programs with key civil society groups that address these issues. The embassy supported four human rights organizations whose goals include strengthening recognition of religious diversity, including animism. U.S. government funding also assisted the local branch of CARITAS, which is affiliated with Catholic Relief Services and local church organizations, and implemented several grassroots projects.

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 coup attempt of 2002 that led to a de facto division between the northern and southern regions of the country. Since 2003 numerous peace accords, including the Linas-Marcoussis Accord, have been signed between the major parties involved in the conflict, but none has resulted in sustained peace or reconciliation.

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 groups have been especially impacted by the conflict. Many ethnic northerners, for example, were Muslim. As a result, many Muslims were assumed to be and were targeted as suspected rebels and rebel sympathizers by the Government during the reporting period.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion although, relations among the various religious groups were at times strained as a consequence of the continuing political crisis. Strong efforts by religious and civil society groups helped prevent the political crisis from turning into a religious conflict; however, there continued to be some societal discrimination against Muslims and followers of traditional indigenous religions.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 124,500 square miles and a population of approximately 18 million. An estimated 35 to 40 percent of the country was Christian or syncretistic, practicing a mixture of Christian and indigenous religions. Approximately 35 percent of the population was Muslim, while an estimated 25 to 30 percent of the population practiced traditional indigenous religions. Many persons who were nominally Christians or Muslims also practiced some aspects of traditional indigenous religions, particularly as economic or political conditions worsened.

Christian sub groups found in the country included the Roman Catholic Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Southern Baptist Church, the Coptics, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). The largest Protestant church was the Protestant Methodist Church of Cote d'Ivoire. Evangelical groups such as the Shekinah Glory Ministries and the Assemblies of God also were active. Syncretistic churches included the Harrist Church (an African Protestant denomination founded in the country in 1913 by a Liberian preacher named William Wade Harris), the Primitive Protestant Church, God's Soldiers (founded by an Ivoirian woman), and the Messianic Church. Bossonism, a traditional religious practice from the Akan ethnic group, was also practiced.

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

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

There has been an increase in the membership of evangelical churches. Missionary work, urbanization, immigration, and higher education levels were also believed to have contributed to a decline in the percentage of practitioners of traditional religions. Generally, practitioners of traditional religions have followed a trend of conversion to Christianity and Islam.

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

Both Catholics and Protestants were found in the southern and central regions. Additionally, Catholics were concentrated in the east, while Protestants were also found in the southwest. Practitioners of traditional indigenous religions were concentrated in rural areas of the country. Generally, the north was associated with Islam and the south with Christianity and other traditional religions.

Political and religious affiliations tended to follow ethnic lines. For example, the Mende and Voltaic groups, which included the Malinke and Senufo people, were largely Muslim. The Akan ethnic group, which included the Baoule and Agni people, tended to be Catholic. There was also some correlation between religion and political affiliations and socio-economic class. For example, most Muslims favored the opposition Rally of Republicans (RDR) party; additionally, the merchant class was mostly Muslim.

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

Missionaries were active in the country and were primarily from the United States and Europe—the most prevalent missionaries being from the Baptist 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. Although there is no state religion, the Government informally favors Christianity for historical and ethnic reasons.

In the past, the Government informally favored the Roman 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 political party, dominated by Muslims, boycotted the last legislative elections in 2000. During the reporting period, Muslims represented nine out of thirty-one ministers in the transitional government's cabinet. In the previous government of National Reconciliation, formed after the January 2003 Linas-Marcoussis peace accords, Muslims made up twelve of forty ministers.

In addition to the legislature, Muslims continued to be disproportionately underrepresented in media outlets, such as radio and television, as well. Of the approximately eighty-eight radio frequencies in the government-controlled zone, for example, there were seven Catholic frequencies, one evangelical, and one Muslim. The Muslim community tried to apply for more radio frequencies in the early 1990s but were unsuccessful in their attempt.

The armed forces were dominated by southerners, few of whom were Muslim. Christian members of the military are offered access to chaplains, and Muslim members are allowed 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. Although the position of Muslim military chaplain was created in 1967, it was only in 2003 that a Muslim military chaplain was designated. During the reporting period, seven active-duty Muslim soldiers went on pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Government observes major Muslim and Christian religious holidays. The recognized Muslim 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.

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. No progress on the mosque occurred since shortly after the outbreak of the rebellion in 2002, due to a withdrawal of financial support from Islamic Arab governments concerned over the country's decreased stability.

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 administrative board, and other information to the Ministry of Territorial Administration. The Ministry of Territorial Administration investigates through the Ministry of Security the backgrounds of the founding members to ensure that the group has no politically subversive members or purpose. Despite this thorough registration process, no religious group had complained of arbitrary registration procedures or problems with gaining government recognition. Traditional indigenous religious groups were less formally organized, and none had applied for registration or recognition. There is no evidence that indigenous groups would be denied if they were to apply.

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. No particular religion has been favored 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 foreign missionaries were denied such registration arbitrarily.

The Government recognizes and oversees all schools, regardless of religion, that meet certain nationally established curriculum requirements. The national curriculum was the minimum standard of teaching in sciences and liberal arts; schools operated by religious groups were free to also teach and regulate their own religion courses.

Religious instruction is permitted in public schools and is usually offered outside of normal class hours by established Islamic, Catholic, and Protestant groups, including evangelical churches. The Government did not interfere with Muslim, Catholic or Protestant groups that wished to provide religious instruction in public schools during students' vacation breaks.

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. In theory, the Government subsidizes private secondary schools, although arrears

have been accumulating for several years. Some of these subsidized schools are run by Christian groups. Muslim groups operate only primary schools, although a Muslim school in Daloa is trying to build a secondary school.

The Government recognized several Muslim schools as official schools whose curriculum would be overseen by the State for the first time. One such school, Iqra, was founded in 2003 by the Islamic National Council (CNI) for kindergarten and primary school children in Abidjan. The school is the largest of its kind and enrolled approximately 300 Muslim children in 2005. Students followed the state's official curriculum with the addition of prayer and instruction in traditional Muslim values. During the reporting period, Iqra received books, computers, and teaching materials from western embassies, including the U.S. and Canadian embassies. The school was built entirely with funds from the Islamic Development Bank received through the CNI.

Unlike in the past, the Government did not give any money to religious associations other than schools during the reporting period. 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 faiths and 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. In July 2005 the minister of religion held a debate among various religious groups on the convergence of religion, civilization, and culture.

During the period covered by this report, President Gbagbo continued to meet with Muslims leaders to discuss their particular concerns. For example, on March 17, 2006, the president received members of the Higher Council of Imams and the National Islamic Council (CNI), who presented a memorandum of their proposed solutions to the political crisis, which was rooted in questions of citizenship and which has negatively impacted many Muslims. These proposals condemned discrimination against Muslims on the basis of their ethnic origins and sought to promote tolerance. Despite their intentions, the discussions resulted in few changes and were, ultimately, unsuccessful in alleviating the country's deep political and ethnic divisions.

As with Muslim groups, President Gbagbo continued to meet frequently with traditional chiefs to listen to their concerns; however, such meetings were also unsuccessful in bridging the deep political and ethnic divisions and promoting greater social inclusion of all religions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Unlike in previous years, 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; however, many Muslims continued to believe that they were targets of discrimination by the Government, since they were often perceived as being rebel sympathizers. The perception of discrimination amongst Muslims lessened with the creation of the power sharing Government of National Reconciliation in 2003 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 cards which document their citizenship. As northern citizens, they complained that, when applying for passports, they were asked to provide more documents than applicants from southern ethnic groups which are predominantly non-Muslim. Additionally, there were reports that police officers confiscated or destroyed identity cards belonging to northern citizens, telling them they should apply as foreigners for a resident permit (carte de séjour). Government security forces were also reportedly more likely to extort payments at checkpoints from northerners and foreigners than from southern citizens. Although discrimination in the distribution of identity cards was based on regional and ethnic backgrounds rather than religious ones, the fact that many northerners were Muslims while many southerners were non-Muslim resulted in government actions that disadvantaged Muslims in this process. While lack of an identification card was not an obstacle to obtaining employment, those without the cards were unable to vote; consequently, many Muslims from the north who were denied identity cards were excluded politically.

In contrast to their relationship with the Government, many northern Muslims believed that the rebel New Forces group supported their efforts against discrimination by making the issuance of identification cards, once again, a key demand in the peace process. The new prime minister, in place since December 2005, made the implementation of a national identification process one of his top priorities. While the prime minister's goal was to have this process completed in time for the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, which have been postponed since 2005 and were scheduled before the conclusion of 2006, this process had barely begun by the end of the period covered by this report.

Another point of friction between the Government and Muslim groups were Hajj trips. Each year President Gbagbo used state funds to pay for a small, politically selected group of Muslims to make the Hajj pilgrimage. Private Islamic organizations also organized groups to make the Hajj, under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior to protect the pilgrims from problems that occurred in the past with fraudulent travel agencies. The Government's requirements were somewhat stricter than those of the Saudi government. For example, it required a minimum of one hundred pilgrims per group, whereas the Saudis require fifty pilgrims per incoming group, in addition to a doctor, nurse, and religious leader. The Government also required any group seeking to organize Hajj pilgrims to have been in existence for three to four years.

Some Muslim organizations continued to view the Government's additional organizational requirements for Hajj pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia as unnecessary and unwarranted interference in religious affairs, considering that Christian churches organize several Christian pilgrimages throughout the year without government supervision. In 2003 the Islamic Umma Front and the National Trade Union of Couriers asked the Government to liberalize the Hajj process so that pilgrims could organize the trips more easily without government involvement. A Ministry of Religion official responded to this request by stating that the Government must be involved in the organization of the Hajj since it involved 3,000 to 4,000 citizens leaving the country each year. During the reporting period, the prime minister's office supported Hajj travelers by chartering a plane to send 485 pilgrims to Mecca after they were defrauded by an unreliable travel agency.

Like some Muslims, practitioners of traditional indigenous religions also experienced political exclusion. Although there is no generally accepted system for classifying the country's diverse traditional religious practices, which vary by ethnic group, village, family, gender, and age group, members of the country's largely Christian and Islamic urban elite that were heavily influence the state, generally appeared disinclined to allow traditional indigenous religions the social status accorded to Christianity and Islam. Despite the resistance to traditional religions, at the beginning of important ceremonies, traditional chiefs were often invited 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

There were no arrests in a 2004 incident in which someone shot at five imams of the executive committee of the High Council of Imams.

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 faith community, in order to allow a private citizen to build a supermarket. The local imam presented a document signed by the Marcory police superintendent in 1990 authorizing the construction of the mosque. The mayor of Marcory intervened, and although the imam's house was destroyed, the mosque itself was spared.

Conditions for Christian religious groups in rebel-controlled areas of the north and west remained the same. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of Christians being unable to practice as they wished.

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.

Northerners, many of whom are Muslim, frequently experienced discrimination on the basis of their ethnic or regional origin. Based on these factors, many were presumed to support the presidential candidacy of former prime minister Alassane Ouattara, a Muslim.

Followers of traditional indigenous religions were also subject to societal discrimination. Some Christians and Muslims refused to associate with practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Many Christian or Islamic leaders disparaged practitioners of traditional indigenous religions as "pagans" or practitioners of "black magic," even though many indigenous religions discourage such practices. Despite these hostile attitudes towards indigenous religions, many practitioners of traditional indigenous religions were unaware of or did not consider themselves victims of societal discrimination, nor did they complain about their treatment.

Prior to the 2002 crisis, there were examples of long-standing cooperation amongst religious groups, evidenced by interfaith prayer vigils, services, and events. Since the start of the conflict, religious leaders from diverse groups have assembled on their own initiative to mediate tensions. Interfaith activities saw a decrease in activity during the past year due to a lack of funding. While religious leaders continued to attend each other's main religious celebrations as symbolic acts of reconciliation, few if any, leaders of traditional indigenous religious groups have been included in these interfaith initiatives.

The Forum of Religious Confessions (The Forum) is an interfaith organization that endeavors to promote dialogue, increase understanding, and improve relationships among religious leaders and groups. It is headed by the leader of the Celestial Christian Church. The Research Group in Democracy and Social and Economic Development of Cote d'Ivoire (GERDDES–CI) created the forum, which engages 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. Previously the Ministry of Religion cooperated closely and regularly with the Forum; however, this ministry was absorbed into the Ministry of Interior when Prime Minister Banny's government was formed in January 2006. The new Department of Religion within the Ministry of Interior was less involved with the Forum.

SECTION IV. U.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, when rebel forces seized control of the northern 60 percent of the country, the U.S. embassy assisted efforts by the Government and nongovernmental organizations to mitigate religious tensions in the country. To assist in this way, the U.S. ambassador and other U.S. government officials regularly met with religious leaders. For example, on March 16, 2006, the embassy hosted an interfaith women's round-table discussion entitled "Women of Faith: Agents of Peace, Reconciliation, and Tolerance." Fifty Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant women discussed ways to promote religious and political tolerance.

This event followed an earlier roundtable discussion organized by the embassy on October 22, 2005. The discussion involved fifty Muslim women of various backgrounds, including journalists, politicians, professors, students, and professional women of various descriptions, and was entitled "Muslim Women: What Is Their Role in the Reconciliation Process?" The discussion was wide-ranging and emphasized the importance of promoting tolerance, educating communities about how to avoid discrimination and prejudice, making efforts to get to know women from other faith communities, and making peaceful overtures to all.

During the reporting period, three religious leaders from Cote d'Ivoire—an imam, a priest, and a pastor—traveled to the United States on a program called "Religion and the Community." Participants explored religious diversity by meeting with American Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants, in addition to adherents of smaller American religious groups, to discuss how their communities address tolerance and religious freedom issues. They also met with the largest faith-based cable network in the United States to learn more about religious diversity in the media.

On February 27, 2006, the embassy hosted a digital videoconference entitled "Martin Luther King: A Model of Religious Non-Violence and Reconciliation Efforts." The discussion focused on King's legacy as a role model for tolerance. Thirty-five guests, including imams, priests, pastors, a Muslim member of the National Assembly, leaders of women's religious groups, and faithful laypersons engaged in an exchange with the speaker, a former U.S. diplomat. The speaker highlighted America's efforts to promote ethnic and religious tolerance. Following the presentation, the participants discussed the tenets of King's teachings relevant to the country's crisis.

Those in attendance agreed to work on strengthening the protection of minorities, renouncing violence, promoting interfaith cooperation, and teaching tolerance and acceptance from an early age, in each of their communities.

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

DJIBOUTI

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 8,450 square miles and a population of approximately 700,000. More than 99 percent of the population was Sunni Muslim. There were a small number of Roman Catholics, Protestants, Copts, and followers of the Baha'i Faith, together accounting for less than 1 percent of the population. There were no known practitioners of traditional indigenous religions. Because all citizens officially are considered Muslims if they do not adhere to another faith, there were no figures available on the number of atheists in the country.

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

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

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution, while declaring Islam to be the state religion, provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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, which was almost completely implemented in February 2004. This court uses laws from both the Family Code and Shari'a to rule on matters related to the family such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

The Government requires that religious groups register with the Ministry of 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 two-year bilateral agreement detailing the scope of the group's activities. Unlike in previous years, Baha'i members reported no incidents of discrimination but did not confirm whether the organization submitted a request for registration during the period covered by this report. In previous years, such requests have been refused.

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

The country observes the Muslim holidays of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the 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.

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

The Ministry of Muslim Affairs monitors the activities of Muslims, but it does not restrict their religious practices. The ministry 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; however, other Government employees are not required to do so.

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

The generally amicable 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. Moderate Muslim clerics attribute the rise in Islamic fundamentalism in part to the international media, Saudi Wahhabi schools, the growing number of Islamic groups, and graduates of Saudi Arabian or Yemeni Islamic schools.

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

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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives periodically meet with leaders and members of religious communities and with U.S. NGOs with a missionary component. 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 attitudes towards religious differences, with use of the Arabic language encouraged wherever appropriate.

EQUATORIAL 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 during the period covered by this report. Because of perceived government sensitivity and possible repercussions, religious groups practice self-censorship regarding criticism of the Government.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,827 square miles, and the Government estimated the population is approximately one million (other sources estimate the population to be approximately 586,000). Christians accounted for approximately 93 percent of the population, and 5 percent of the population practiced traditional indigenous religions. Muslims, members of the Baha'i Faith, practitioners of other religions, and atheists each comprised less than 1 percent of the population. Roman Catholicism was the principal religion, dating to the Spanish colonial period when almost the entire population was baptized into the faith and until recently was the primary way to register a birth. Catholics comprised approximately 87 percent of the population, and an estimated 6 percent belonged to Protestant and independent denominations. Many Catholics reportedly also followed 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 to practically all areas.

Foreign missionaries operated both on Bioko Island and the mainland. These included Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Nondenominational evangelical Christian groups were also present, including those who translate the Bible into indigenous languages.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 was not observed.

A 1992 presidential decree regulates the exercise of religious freedom. This decree maintains an official preference for the Roman Catholic Church and the Reform Church of Equatorial Guinea, due to their traditional roots and pervasive influence in the social and cultural life of the populace. While the decree does not hinder the practice of other religions, its effects can be observed in many events throughout the country; for example, 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 of oversees compliance with the decree and the registration process. This application was not required of the Catholic and Reform churches.

The application and approval process may take several years, but such delay appears to be the result of bureaucratic inefficiency and not of a policy designed to impede any religious group. Groups that include beneficial social programs, such as health projects or schools, reportedly are approved more quickly. Enforcement of registration requirements is inconsistent. Unregistered groups operating in the country can be fined. Such fines are rarely applied, but the Government announced over the radio that any unregistered church was subject to fines or closure and should regulate its status as soon as possible. No permanent closures were observed, although there were isolated instances of temporary closures on dubious legal grounds that some have linked to efforts at influence peddling.

The exact number of registered denominations was not publicly available.

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

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

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 had been granted for a new radio station to operate, but only to broadcast religious programs.

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

The Government did not arrest and detain foreign missionaries, although one pastor received such serious threats that he felt compelled to return to his West African country. In another case, a major U.S. evangelical figure was brought to the country to conduct an outreach, and attendees were forced out as the church was locked up by a squad of armed police. The evangelist left the country and was told by security officers he should not return.

While there was no reported workplace discrimination targeted against a 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.

In 2004, during legislative and municipal elections, security forces and the former mayor of Malabo threatened to jail a missionary pastor who had removed party campaign posters of the ruling party from the walls of his church. No action was taken against the missionary and the mayor was later replaced, reportedly for a pattern of decisions that did not reflect well on the Government.

The country's fundamental law on religion states that each person is free to study his or her own religion and should not be forced to study another faith. Children of all faiths are allowed to enroll in 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 two to three months.

In 2003 religious leaders reported a positive relationship with the new supervising director general at the Ministry of Justice, Worship, and Penitentiary Institutions.

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 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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

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 constitution, written in 1997, 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 institutions—the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, and Islam. 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 did not improve overall, and in some areas deteriorated further. 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. The Government also intervened in procedural and administrative decisions of the Eritrean Orthodox Church by displacing 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. While there were no reports of torture of religious detainees during the reporting period, some religious detainees were held in harsh conditions that included extreme temperature fluctuations with limited or no access to family.

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 regularly 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 which it feared would disrupt the country's "social harmony." The Government further maintained that upon demarcation of the border with Ethiopia, it would implement the constitution and fully respect human rights. In November 2005 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 approximately 3.6 million. Although reliable statistics were not available, it was estimated that 60 percent of the population was Sunni and 30 percent was Orthodox Christian. The population also included a small number of Roman Catholics (about 5 percent), Protestants (about 2 percent), smaller numbers of Seventh-day Adventists, and fewer than 1,500 Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 2 percent practiced traditional indigenous religions. Also present in very small numbers were practicing Buddhists, Hindus, and Baha'is (less than 1 percent). The population in the eastern and western lowlands was predominantly Muslim and in the highlands was predominantly Christian. There were very few atheists. Religious participation was high among all ethnic groups.

Within geographic and ethnic groups, the majority of the Tigrinya was Orthodox Christian, with the exception of the Djiberti Tigrinya, who were Muslim. Most members of the Tigre, Saho, Nara, Afar, Rashaida, Beja, and Blen ethnic groups were Muslim. Approximately 40 percent of the Blen are Christian, the majority being Roman Catholic. More than half of the Kunama were Catholic, with a large minority of Muslims and some who practiced traditional indigenous religions. The central and southern highlands, which were generally more developed than the lowlands, were 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, lived in the eastern lowlands. The Blen lived on the border between the western lowlands and the central highlands and are concentrated in the Keren area, which also in-

cluded a significant minority of Tigre and Tigrinya speakers. The Beja, Kunama, Nara, and most Tigre lived in the western lowlands.

Foreign missionaries operated, including representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim faiths. Some missionaries and representatives of the restricted unregistered religious groups were present but kept an extremely low profile for fear of abuse of their congregations. In some instances, the Government restricted missionary visas, and in one case, imprisoned a foreign missionary. Several international faith-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) provide humanitarian aid, including Caritas, Norwegian Church Aid, Lutheran World Federation, Samaritan's Purse, Catholic Relief Services, and the Islamic Mufti's Relief Organization. The Government asked Mercy Corps and several secular NGOs to cease operations during the reporting period.

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 its provisions 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.

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

The Government approved no registrations during the period covered by this report, despite the fact that four religious groups fully complied with registration requirements more than four years ago and continued to inquire with the concerned government offices. Several religious groups have complied partially with the registration requirements, and some have chosen not to submit any documentation. In April 2005 the Government's representative at the U.N.'s Commission on Human Rights stated that the Seventh-day Adventist Church's registration application would be "finalized in the near future"; however, to date the Church's application had not been approved.

The four government-registered religious groups were not required to fill out the same registration forms as other groups, and their services and activities were allowed to continue. They have been requested to provide the Government with an accounting of their financial sources, as well as lists of personnel and real property, and have reportedly done so. However, the Government increased its involvement in the four major groups by appointing a lay administrator to run the Orthodox Church and instructing the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church to take over the administration and liturgy of the Evangelical Episcopalian congregation.

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

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

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

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

Education is predominantly secular.

The Government made little effort to promote interfaith understanding or to coordinate interfaith dialogue.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Islam and Christianity were practiced widely and were for the most part tolerated, with persons allowed to worship freely. Christianity and Islam have a centuries-old history of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between them. Following the 2002 government decree that certain religious groups must register or cease all religious activities, religious facilities not belonging to the four government-approved religious groups were forced to close. Authorities in the Office of Religious Affairs told religious groups that home prayer meetings would be permitted, but the Government did not fully respect this guidance. 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 arbitrarily enforced this law.

Authorities generally have not hindered the four groups that filled out their registration applications in 2002—the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Faith Mission Church, and the Baha'i Faith—in holding home prayer or private study meetings, although like other unregistered groups their houses of worship remain closed and they are not permitted to meet in public settings. Religious groups such as the Kale Hiwot (Baptists), Full Gospel Church, and Meserete Kristos (Mennonite) Church have complied with some, but not all, of the registration requirements. Treatment of these and other unregistered religious groups often varied depending on the locale. Some local authorities 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, whose religious beliefs or services it did not approve of, and continued to harass its members, placing some in prolonged detention. In October 2004 three men that the Government considered to be organizers were jailed without charges and remained in detention at the end of the reporting period. In early 2006 the Government threatened more than sixty members of this congregation if they did not withdraw support for a petition protesting the Government's intervention in the Orthodox Church.

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

A 1995 proclamation bans religious organizations from involvement in politics and restricts the right of religious media to comment on political matters. No religious groups—registered or unregistered—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; however, this proclamation was not enforced in practice. Several religious organizations executed small-scale development projects without government interference. The proclamation also set out rules governing relations between religious organizations and foreign sponsors.

The military has no chaplains. Military personnel 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.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were numerous credible reports that several hundred members of unregistered religious groups were detained or imprisoned at various times since 2002. During the reporting period, there were reliable reports that authorities detained at least 450 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 make it difficult to determine the precise number of religious prisoners at

any one time, and releases sometimes go unreported; however, the number of long-term prisoners continued to grow. Some NGOs reported as many as 1,700 prisoners of conscience in detention.

The Government reportedly holds individuals who are 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 include extreme temperature fluctuations. Many were asked 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 also objected to universal national service because of the requirement that Muslim women must perform military duty. Some religious practitioners in the Catholic Church also objected.

Although members of several religious groups, including Muslims, reportedly were imprisoned in past years for failure to participate in national military service, the Government 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 government-approved religions.

Arrests of individuals, ostensibly for noncompliance with national service requirements, yet apparently targeting certain religious groups, continued throughout the year. 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 218 individuals reported as detained during the previous reporting period, 122 remained incarcerated. Many of them were held in military prisons for not having performed required national military service, and many belonged to unregistered religious groups. Several pastors and dozens of women were among the imprisoned. Many have 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. At least three received a legal sentence for violation of the government restriction on belonging to an unregistered religious group and were serving two-year prison terms. One was released after he was declared medically unfit for military service.

The Government singled out Jehovah's Witnesses for particularly harsh treatment. According to credible sources, a total of thirty-one Jehovah's Witnesses were being held without charges or trial. More than a dozen were being detained at Sawa, eight for allegedly failing to perform national military service. Detainees above the cut-off age for national service eligibility (forty for men and twenty-seven 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 eleven years, reportedly for evading compulsory military service. However, the maximum legal penalty for refusing to perform national service is two 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 no reports that the security forces tortured those detained for their religious beliefs during this reporting period; however, in June 2005 there were credible reports that nineteen members of unregistered churches died at the Wia military camp after authorities bound them by the hands and feet and left them outside in extremely hot conditions. Detention conditions continued to be harsh. In June 2006 there were reports that at least five of fifteen detainees died from exposure after escaping from a detention facility in the southern part of the country.

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 do so on their behalf.

On July 8, 2005, police arrested eighteen students and a professor from Halhale College, approximately twenty miles from Asmara, as they finished their exams. At the end of the reporting period their status remained unknown.

On August 21, 2005, police arrested a bridal couple and eighteen wedding guests from an unregistered church at the private wedding ceremony at the bride's home. At the end of the reporting period their status remained unknown.

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 one month later, it was not known how many of the others were released or subjected to further detention.

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

Over the Christmas holiday, seventy-eight individuals were detained after raids on businesses owned by Evangelical Christians, Pentecostals and other members of unregistered churches. Two individuals were released after signing pledges not to practice their faith and paying a bail of $10,000 (150,000 nakfa). During the raid several church members managed to escape and depart the country or go into hiding. Authorities threatened the 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.

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.

In February 2006 thirteen members of the Kale Hiwot church were arrested in Mendefera in the home of a church member. They reportedly remained detained at the end of the reporting period.

Also 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, seventy-five Christians were detained and punished for reading the Bible. They continued to be held at Sawa.

In spring 2006 the BBC reported that a British missionary was detained for several days, and subsequently expelled, for distributing Bibles.

In May 2006 there were reports that fifty evangelical Christian students enrolled and boarding at Mai Nefhiy Educational Institution were allegedly 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 continued to be detained at Mai Nefhiy.

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 June 2006 there were reports in the North Red Sea region that authorities detained six members of an unregistered church. They were held in a military camp and released after four days.

Throughout the reporting period there were reports of the detention of Muslims who oppose the mufti appointed by the Government more than ten years ago. Sources reported that approximately seventy Muslims continued to be detained.

During the reporting period there were significant changes orchestrated by the Government with the leadership of the Eritrean Orthodox Church that raised 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 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. He remained essentially under house arrest. According to church officials, Dioscoros was the new patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church.

Following the deposal of Patriarch Antonios by the Synod, more than sixty members of a fellowship of the Orthodox Church were told to withdraw their signatures from a petition protesting the closure of their fellowship and to confess that the church leaders, namely the deposed patriarch, were heretics. There were reports that these sixty members were excommunicated from the Church by the new patriarch and that at least three of them were arrested by authorities.

In January 2005 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.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were reports that police forced some adherents of unregistered religious groups to sign statements to abandon their faiths 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 government registered 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.

Societal attitudes toward Jehovah's Witnesses and some Pentecostal groups were an exception to this general tolerance. 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 refusal 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.

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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, the Ministry of Justice, and the leaders of the sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

In September 2004 the 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 little change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, although some Protestant and Muslim groups continued to complain that local officials discriminated against them when seeking land for churches, mosques, and cemeteries.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society continued to contribute to religious freedom. In general, there was a slight increase in interreligious conflict and clashes. Government criticism of some Muslim elements continued. There was reported tension between traditionalist Muslims and followers of

the Wahhabi sect, an interpretation of Islam that reportedly receives support from Saudi Arabia.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 472,000 square miles, and its population was approximately 74 million. An estimated 40 to 45 percent of the population belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). The EOC was predominant in the northern regions of Tigray and Amhara.

Approximately 45 percent of the population was Sunni Muslim. Islam was most prevalent in the eastern Somali and Afar regions, as well as in all the major parts of Oromia in the east and south.

Christian evangelical and Pentecostal groups continued to be the fastest growing faiths and constituted an estimated 10 percent of the population. Established Protestant churches such as Mekane Yesus and the Kale Hiwot were strongest in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Regional State (SNNPR), western and central Oromia, and in urban areas. In Gambella in the west, Mekane Yesus followers represented 60 percent of the population. The Evangelical Church Fellowship claimed 23 denominations under its religious umbrella.

Oriental Rite and Latin Rite Roman Catholics numbered more than 500,000. There were reportedly more than 7,500 Jehovah's Witnesses adherents and 105 Kingdom Halls in the country. Jews, animists, and other practitioners of traditional indigenous religions made up most of the remaining population. In Addis Ababa and north Gondar, in the Amhara region, some claimed that their ancestors were forced to convert from Judaism to Ethiopian Orthodoxy (Feles Mora) many centuries ago. There were very few atheists. Although precise data was not available, active participation in religious services was generally high throughout the country.

A large number of foreign missionary groups operated in the country. Protestant organizations that sponsored or supported missionary work included the Baptist Bible Fellowship, the New Covenant Baptist Church, the Baptist Evangelical Association, Mekane Yesus Church (associated with the Lutheran Church), Kale Hiwot Church (associated with Service in Mission), Hiwot Berhan Church (associated with the Swedish Philadelphia Church), Genet Church (associated with the Finnish Mission), Lutheran-Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia, Emnet Christos, Muluwongel (Full Gospel) Church, and Messerete Kristos (associated with the Mennonite Mission). Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) also had active missionary operations.

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 constitution requires the separation of state and religion and prohibits a state religion, and the Government generally respected these provisions in practice. In 2003, the Federal Government interfered in the internal affairs of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC) by orchestrating the installation of EIASC officials following an internal power struggle.

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

The EOC never registered with the Government and has never faced repercussions. The EIASC, after registering nine 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. Mekane Yesus, the Evangelical Fellowship, and Roman Catholic Church believed that churches should be placed in a "different status than NGOs." However, there was no change in the government policy during the period covered by this report.

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 resulted in a denial of legal standing, which would prevent it from opening a bank account or fully participating in any court proceeding.

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

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

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 interpreted the constitutional provision for separation of religion and state to mean that religious instruction was 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 taught as part of their curriculum were not free of religious influence. Churches were permitted to have Sunday schools, the Qur'an was taught at mosques, and public schools permitted the formation of clubs, including those of a religious nature.

The Government officially recognizes both Christian and Muslim holidays and continues to mandate a two-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 Muslim 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 took steps to promote interfaith understanding by including religious leaders in major societal campaigns. All principal religious leaders were present at the launching of the National Partnership Forum against HIV/AIDS and at the 2004 national rollout of antiretroviral treatment. No interreligious exchanges were conducted during the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government bans the formation of political parties based on religion. There 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 are 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.

The EIASC oversees the activities of foreign imams and screens out perceived Wahhabi influence.

Under the press law, it is a crime to incite one religion against another. The press law also allows defamation claims involving religious leaders to be prosecuted as criminal cases. There were no further developments nor were there likely to be any developments in the Government's defamation case against two journalists in 2001. The EHRCO reported that no journalists were detained or charged during the reporting period with inciting religious groups or with defamation of religious leaders.

Evangelical leaders complained that, in general, regulations on the importation of Bibles were too strict and that customs duty on Bibles and other religious articles were excessive; however, Bibles and religious articles were subject to the same customs duties as all imported books, donated or otherwise. Continuing discussions between the Government and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus yielded progress on this issue. In 2005, parliament passed a proclamation lifting taxation on imported books and printed materials, effectively addressing this issue.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reported incidents relating to wearing headscarves. However, the case of a Muslim nursing student who refused to change her hijab while attending patients required local religious leaders to successfully mediate the dispute, which resulted in the student wearing a headscarf instead.

Minority religious groups complained of discrimination in the allocation of government land for religious sites. Protestant groups occasionally complained of discrimination by local officials when seeking land for churches and cemeteries. Evangelical leaders complained that because they are perceived as "newcomers," they remained disadvantaged in the allocation of land compared with the EOC and the EIASC.

The EIASC complained that it has more difficulty than the EOC obtaining land from the Government; 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 regional government officials chose not to interpret this provision liberally in the town of Axum, and the Federal Government did not overrule them. Muslims have had access to land since the country became a republic in 1995. In 2003, a group of Muslims attempted to build a mosque in Axum, but it was torn down by a local mob because it was built without permission from the regional government. Local officials ordered the Muslim community not to resume construction.

Providing adequate space for churches within Addis Ababa continued to be a major issue among Protestant groups. These groups noted that the Orthodox Church built at least twenty churches between September 2003 and July 2005, but no other groups were authorized to construct new edifices.

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 pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

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 Oromia some plots were provided free of charge to some religious groups to build places of worship.

The Meserte Kristos/Mennonite Church, Mekane Yesus Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the EIASC made little progress at securing the return of property confiscated by the Government under the Derg regime.

Although the Meserte Kristos/Mennonite Church was able to reclaim its place of worship after the Derg fell from power, the Government seized it again in 2003. The Government defended its action under existing legal mechanisms for seizing property.

The Government did not return properties to the Mekane Yesus Church that were also seized under the Derg regime, including three student hostels and two schools. The Mekane Yesus leadership stated that these issues were still unresolved.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Two men charged with the 2002 killing of Full Gospel Church leader Pastor Demtew remained in prison while their trials continued. The pastor was allegedly killed when a mob led by EOC priests forcibly entered his home. The case was pending at the conclusion of the reporting period.

In another instance, while apparently not religiously motivated, the killing of a Muslim man by a Protestant, whom authorities have prosecuted for the murder, was reported as "martyrdom" on a few websites.

In March 2006 an individual believed to be a Christian and mentally unstable drew demeaning cartoons of Muhammad in the town of Kemisse in the Amhara region. Local Muslims, allegedly considered to be Islamic extremists, organized a protest and caused a riot in Kemisse town, which injured several persons, destroyed four evangelical churches, and caused an estimated $160,000 (1.4 million Birr) in

property damage. Perpetrators of the riot were detained and under investigation at the end of the reporting period.

On April 15, 2006, unidentified groups of individuals suspected to be Muslims from the local community threw a hand grenade at Emanuel United Church of Ethiopia in Jijiga, injuring several worshippers. Police were searching for the perpetrators at the end of the reporting period.

The desecration of the Qur'an by a Christian student at the Southern University on April 17, 2006, angered Muslims throughout the country. Police investigated the case and detained the alleged perpetrator. The case was 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

Members of newer faiths, such as Pentecostals, requested police protection against overt public opposition. 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 sometimes Protestants 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.

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. In Addis Ababa, persons of different faiths lived side-by-side. Most urban areas reflected a mixture of all religious faiths. The Roman Catholic Church and evangelical Protestant denominations provided social services such as health care and education to nonmembers as well as to members.

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, raising concern over external non-Ethiopian Islamic influences.

In 2004, the EIASC struggled with Wahhabist fundamentalism within its ranks and replaced all executive members with staunch anti-Wahhabists. A Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative attended the election sessions to demonstrate the Government's interest in the issue. Additionally, the EIASC expressed concern over the prospect of Wahhabists gaining seats on the council.

In May 2005, religious institutions deployed 1,554 members throughout the country to observe the national election. The EIASC deployed 558 observers, Protestant denominations deployed 607, the EOC deployed 359, and the Catholic Church deployed 30. On June 9, 2005, leaders of religious organizations, including the EOC, EIASC, Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus, and the Catholic Church, made a call for peace following demonstrations in Addis Ababa.

Leaders of the EIASC in collaboration with local EOC leaders diffused tension created by the politically motivated killing of members of the community in Kofele District of Oromia region in July 2005. Following a pair of religiously motivated killings and reports of harassment of Christians by the Muslim majority in this area, religious leaders worked closely together to bring an end to the increasing violence. Upon hearing reports that local imams provided shelter and protection for EOC priests after they were reportedly targeted by local renegade Muslim individuals, religious leaders of both faiths from Addis Ababa came to the region to broker a peace. They convinced local community leaders to work with the population to remind them of the long history of cohabitation that has occurred in the area and that through tolerance they would be building a better community.

Evangelicals claimed that they were not able to bury their dead in cemeteries given to them by the Government because Muslims and Orthodox prevented it. In November 2003, in the Buta Jira area, a Protestant family buried a child in a local

cemetery. Muslims reportedly dug up the body at night and dumped it in town. The family reported the incident to the local police and zonal administration, but reportedly authorities took little action to resolve the case. In Harar, evangelicals also were not able to bury their dead in the same cemeteries used by Orthodox and Muslims. Local and regional governments assign burial plots to various faiths. However, isolated incidents occur and in such instances, local government officials generally address the problem.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The U.S. embassy encouraged the Government to ensure that no religious groups were channeling funds through the country to finance terrorist goals. Embassy officials also made an active effort to visit all of the religious groups and faith-based NGOs during the period covered by this report. The embassy paid close attention to attempts by Wahhabist elements to exert their influence over the EIASC and discussed the matter with government officials. On the same day, the embassy invited twenty-eight members of local Muslim Youth Councils for a wide-ranging discussion with visiting American imam Daryl Wainwright.

The Defense Department's Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF–HOA) projects sought to propagate positive images of the United States in the Muslim community in Somali Region.

In December 2005, the embassy awarded a $26,500 grant for the preservation of the Sheikh Hussein shrine, a historic Muslim pilgrimage site located in Oromia and established in the thirteenth century. The ambassador continued to hold regular meetings with religious leaders around the country.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 103,347 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.5 million. Major religions practiced in the country included Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism), Islam, and traditional indigenous religions. Many persons practiced both elements of Christianity and elements of traditional indigenous religions. It was estimated that approximately 73 percent of the total population, including noncitizens, practiced at least some elements of Christianity; approximately 12 percent practiced Islam (of which 80 to 90 percent are foreigners); approximately 10 percent practiced traditional indigenous religions exclusively; and approximately 5 percent practiced no religion or were atheists. The country's president was a member of the Muslim minority.

Foreign Christian missionaries were present and active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 register small, indigenous religious groups. The Government does not require religious groups to register but recommends that they do so to receive full constitutional protection. No financial or tax benefit is conferred by registration, but religious groups are not taxed, can import duty-free items, and are exempted from land use and construction permit fees.

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

Both Catholic and Protestant radio stations broadcast in the country.

The Government promotes interfaith relations by facilitating meetings of leaders of major religions. Such meetings are held periodically, and informal discussions among religious leaders are routine.

The Government celebrates some Christian and Muslim 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

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

The government television stations accorded free transmission time to the Catholic Church, some Protestant congregations, and Islamic mosques. Some Protestant denominations alleged that the government television station does not accord free airtime to minority religious groups. Protestants have alleged in the past that the armed forces favor Catholics and Muslims in hiring and promotion. Some Protestant pastors complain that local officials discriminated against them by making it difficult to obtain building permits to construct churches, charging visa fees on volunteer medical and religious workers not imposed on other denominations, and demanding customs fees for aid materials. Missionaries expressed concern that foreigners holding valid visas that describe their profession as "pastor" have been denied entry unless they have an additional entry permit issued in advance by immigration. However, there were no reports that any applicant was denied a 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

Practitioners of some traditional indigenous religions inflicted bodily harm on other persons during the period covered by the report. Two adolescent boys found murdered in February 2005 were widely believed to have been the victims of ritual killings. Parents and newspaper articles alleged that seven other males may have been the victims of ritual killings in 2005. Three were reported killed in March, one each in May and July, and two more in December. No information was made public on the investigation, if any, into the circumstances of these crimes or possible suspects. The Ministry of the Interior stated that violence and bodily harm to others in the practice of a traditional religion is a criminal offense and is prosecuted vigorously; however, no information about such prosecutions or their results was available.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

THE GAMBIA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 4,361 square miles, and its population is approximately 1,641,600. Sunni Muslims constituted more than 90 percent of the population. The vast majority were Malikite Sufis, of which the main orders represented were Tijaniyah, Qadiriyah, Muridiyah, and Ahmadiyah. Except for the Ahmadiyah, all Sufi orders prayed together at common mosques. A small percentage of Muslims, predominantly immigrants from South Asia, did not ascribe to any traditional Islamic school of thought.

An estimated 9 percent of the population was Christian, and less than 1 percent practiced indigenous animist religions. The Christian community, situated mostly in the west and south of the country, was predominantly Roman Catholic; there were also several Protestant denominations including Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and various small Protestant evangelical denominations. There was a small group of followers of the Baha'i Faith and no significant Jewish population.

Intermarriage between Muslims and Christians was common. In some areas, Islam and Christianity were syncretized with animism. There were few atheists in the country.

Foreign missionary groups, representing mostly small denominations from Nigeria and Sierra Leone, operated 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 classical Maliki fiqh (Islamic law).

The Government considered the following religious holidays as national holidays: Tobaski (Eid al-Adha), Yaomul Ashura (the Muslim New Year), Maulid al-Nabi (the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad), Koriteh (Eid al-Fitr), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Assumption Day, and Christmas Day. Religious holidays did not affect negatively any religious group.

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

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

Government meetings and events typically commenced with two prayers, one Islamic and one Christian. Senior officials of both religious groups were often invited to open major government events.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In several interviews, Catholic and Anglican bishops praised the Government and people of the country for the friendly protection and accommodation of the Christian minority. The Gambian Christian Council, an organization consisting of clerical

leaders of the Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist churches, discussed matters of importance to Christians in the country.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 regularly to discuss matters of mutual concern.

Practitioners of female genital mutilation (FGM) in the country firmly believed that Islam mandates the practice and its surrounding rites. Although government programs to promote girls' education and development quietly worked to reduce the prevalence of FGM by changing societal attitudes, the Government's official stance was that female circumcision is a cultural issue that the Government cannot forbid. In June 2005 the National Assembly passed the Children's Bill, aimed at curbing violence against children, that outlaws "social and cultural practices that affect the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child and in particular, those customs and practices that are (1) prejudicial to the health and life of the child and; (2) discriminatory to the child on the grounds of sex or other status."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In particular, the U.S. embassy sought opportunities to send religious leaders to the United States on International Visitor Programs.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, tensions sometimes arose between different branches of the same faith, as well as between Christian and traditional faiths. A number of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) promoted interfaith and intrafaith understanding.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 238,538 square miles and an estimated population of approximately 21 million. According to the 2000 government census approximately 69 percent of the population is Christian, 15.6 percent is Muslim, and 15.4 percent adheres to traditional indigenous religions or other faiths. The Muslim community has protested these figures, asserting that the Muslim population is closer to 30 percent. Pentecostal and charismatic churches are reported to be the fastest growing denominations in Ghana. Approximately 6.2 percent of the population does not affiliate itself with a particular religion.

Other religious groups included 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 were also some separatist or spiritual churches that included elements of Christianity and traditional beliefs such as magic and divination. Zetahil, a practice unique to Ghana, combines elements of Christianity and Islam. There were no statistics available for the percentage of atheists.

There was no significant tension between traditional and mainstream religion, rather, there was some degree of overlap in religious practice as traditional religion still had a strong hold on society and in many cases coexisted with formal religions. Many Christians and Muslims, for example, held traditional religious beliefs while also adhering to mainstream religious doctrine or practice. Similarly, many Catholics and Protestants also attended 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 faiths, 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.

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

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

There was not a significant link between ethnicity and religion; however, geography was often associated with religious identity. The majority of the Muslim population was concentrated 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 religions resided in rural areas. Christians lived throughout the country.

Foreign missionaries, including Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, Muslim, and Mormon groups, operated freely in the country. Catholic missionaries were most numerous followed by Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries. In addition to proselytizing, missionaries were active in health, education, skills/vocational training and social activities.

Of the foreign missionaries present in the country, Saudi Arabian missionaries were the most numerous. They were followed by Iranian, Kuwaiti and Algerian missionaries. They practiced Dawah or evangelism and were active in education, cultural, health and agricultural practices.

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, Muslim, and secular holidays.

There is no government body that regulates or oversees religious affairs as all religious bodies are independent institutions; however, religious institutions that wished to have formal government recognition were required to register with the Registrar General's Department. The registration requirement for religious bodies at the Office of the Registrar General was the same for any NGO. The organization paid approximately $0.56 (five thousand cedis) for the application form, approximately $4 (thirty five thousand cedis) for the registration form, and approximately $69 (610 thousand cedis) for the registration. Applicants were required to renew their registration annually for approximately $17 (150 thousand cedis) Registration was only a formality, and there were no reports that the Government denied reg-

istration to any group. Most traditional religions, with the exception of the Afrikania Mission, did not register.

The Government did not provide financial support for any religious organization. Formally registered religions were exempt from paying taxes on ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational activities that do not generate income; however, religious organizations were 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.

Schools in Ghana were first established by Christian and Muslim missionaries. 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 partners; however, the head position of many schools continued to be reserved for a member of the same faith as the school. Additionally, the majority of a school's management team was usually comprised of members who adhere to the same faith as that of the school. All denominations designated education management units to monitor activities in each of their schools.

Public schools could be either day schools or boarding schools and were supported by the Government through the disbursement of grants, paying salaries of employees of these schools and providing learning as well as teaching materials. Christian students attending government-administered boarding schools were required to attend a nondenominational service on Sundays. Muslim students in these boarding schools were exempted from the service and were permitted to practice daily prayers. Most schools accommodated special meal arrangements for fasting Muslim students during Ramadan. Private schools were run by individuals, communities and, in some cases, NGOs.

Religious and Moral Education is a compulsory subject for every child in both public and private schools at the basic or primary level. At this level, religious instruction was general and did not focus on any single religion. At the secondary level, religious studies was an optional subject and differed from the Religious and Moral education classes taken at the primary level. Students could choose between Christian Religious Studies, Islamic Religious Studies, or Traditional African Religion regardless of whether they attend a private or public school. Such options were not influenced by government funding as the Government did not discriminate in its allocation of resources for any of these courses. There were nine other private, secular schools and five public universities already functioning in the country. The country's first Catholic university opened in 2004.

The Government often took steps to promote interfaith understanding. At government meetings and receptions, there was usually a multi-denominational invocation led by religious leaders from various faiths. In April 2006, President John A. Kufuor met with a visiting delegation from the International Religious Liberty Association, which held its second Pan-African, International Religious Liberty Congress (IRLC) in Accra during that time. The minister of fisheries opened the conference. President Kufuor met the delegation and expressed his government's commitment to ensuring religious freedom.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Ministry of Education regulations prohibited authorities of public schools from compelling students of minority faiths to worship with the majority religious groups in school. The minister of education also 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, in comparison to previous years. In a few cases reported by the Director of the Islamic Education Unit in the Greater Accra Region, 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 religious obligations by some school administrators. For example, some school administrations reportedly did not accommodate religious practices when regulating school attire or when scheduling examinations on their holy days of obligation (Fridays for Muslims and Saturdays for Seventh-day). Also, there were isolated instances in which bans on female head-scarves were introduced into some schools. Some Muslim students felt discriminated against by these policies, since they noted that the same restriction was not placed on Catholic nuns who dressed in accordance with their religious order.

In November 2005, 149 students of The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church at the University of Ghana, Legon, took legal action in the Accra Fast Track High Court. The legal action was an attempt to restrain the university from requiring the students to take examinations on Saturdays. Although the SDA students noted that the university provided accommodations for student athletes scheduled to take exams on Saturdays, the High Court threw out their ex-parte motion on the grounds that, if granted, it could affect a larger number of other students beyond those requesting these accommodations. The court also highlighted that, in addition to the two-thirds of the student body who took exams on weekends, Muslims took exams on Fridays. Concluding that the university had not shown discrimination or favoritism to a particular group, and noting that SDA students had not established irreparable loss as a definitive consequence of taking Saturday exams, the court sided with the university and denied the students' request to reschedule Saturday exams. While various individuals and organizations, including the World Headquarters for Seventh-day Adventists, Ghana Union of Seventh-day Adventists, and the U.S embassy intervened on the students' behalf, the university has not yet agreed to make any additional accommodations or compromise and future action appears unlikely. At the end of the period covered by this report, school officials had the discretion regarding whether and how to accommodate holy days or obligation of any religious group when scheduling exams.

Because of increasing concerns about vandalism and cheating in schools, school administrators attempted to target sources of "misbehavior" among students during the reporting period. Some administrators attributed acts of misbehavior to occultism and attempted to regulate student behavior in this regard. By the end of the reporting period, there was no official government policy targeting students perceived as partaking in occultism.

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 between the various religious communities were generally amicable and spokespersons for these communities often advocate tolerance towards different religions; however, there was occasional tension among some religious groups.

Public discussion continued over religious worship versus traditional practices and respect for the rights and customs of others in a diverse society. While some religious leaders actively discouraged religiously motivated violence, discrimination, or harassment; others, particularly lay persons associated with evangelical groups, continued to preach intolerance for other religions such as Islam and traditional religions. In an address during the first quarter of 2006, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Reverend Dr. Yaw Frimpong-Manso, described the practice whereby Christian leaders who honor the programs and share the same platforms with non-Christians and practitioners of other religions as dangerous.

In June 2006 the media reported physical tensions between the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) and Ga traditional authority, a chieftaincy group for ethnic Gas in the Accra area, when members from each group physically confronted each other. This incident developed when the CAC violated the annual monthly ban on drumming imposed by traditional authorities in Accra. For years CAC's use of drumming and other musical instruments in their services was a source of tension between this group and the Ga traditional authority and in 2001 resulted in violence.

In December 2005 the Volta Regional Police Command banned the annual convention of the Apostles Revelation Society at Tadzewu, the headquarters of the Apostles Revelation Society church. The police took this step to deter a possible outbreak of violence expected to erupt between factions within the group. After the natural death of its founder, the group has been beset by a series of conflicts between factions, leading to court suits, threats, and skirmishes. This is the second year the convention has been banned. In December 2004, the Volta Regional Security Council (REGSEC) banned the 2004 annual convention for the same reasons.

Some Muslims continued to feel a sense of political and social exclusion as Christianity continued to pervade 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 con-

tributed to this perception of marginalization and discrimination within the Muslim community.

In addition to Islam, some religious practices deriving from indigenous customs also faced discrimination. Trokosi, a religious practice indigenous to the southern Volta region, involves pledging family members, most commonly teenagers but sometimes children under the age of ten, to extended service at a shrine to atone for another family member's sins. Trokosis (the pledged family member) help with the upkeep of these shrines and pour libations during prayers. Trokosis sometimes live near shrines, often with extended family members, during their period of service, which lasts from a few months to three years.

Reports on the number of women and girls bound to various Trokosi shrines varied; however, a shrine rarely had more than four Trokosis serving their atonements at any one time. According to credible reports from international observers and local leaders, there were no more than fifty girls serving at Trokosi shrines throughout the Volta Region. Reports by local leaders, district authorities, shrine priests, elders, and human rights activists indicated that the incidence of Trokosi was declining considerably.

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

Although local officials portray Trokosis as a traditional practice that was not abusive, some NGOs maintained that Trokosis were subject to sexual exploitation and forced labor. Meanwhile, supporters of traditional African religions, such as the Afrikania Renaissance Mission, said that these NGOs misrepresent their beliefs and regarded their campaigns against Trokosi as religious persecution. Government agencies, such as CHRAJ, had at times actively campaigned against it.

Belief in witchcraft remained strong in many areas. Rural women continued to be banished by traditional village authorities or their families for suspected witchcraft. Most accused witches were older women, often widows, who were identified by fellow villagers 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 return 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 and return to their community.

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.

There were several cases of lynching and assault of accused witches although the law provides protection for alleged witches. 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. In September Yendi police arrested a Tamabo farmer for allegedly cudgeling to death a woman suspected of being a witch. In August 2004 the court sentenced a man to death for killing his wife, who he believed was a witch. Both cases remained opened at the end of the period covered by this reporting period.

Human rights activists continued to express concerns about prayer camps in which individuals believed to be possessed by evil spirits are chained for weeks, physically assaulted, and denied food and water. In 2003, Youth Alert Network found that 80 percent of the fifty Volta Region prayer camps it surveyed engaged in such practices. Among the victims were family members who were blamed for misfortunes and the mentally ill, some reportedly as young as six years old. Families sent these victims to be exorcised of evil spirits. The victims were held at the camps until they were considered healed. Media reports indicate that these abusive practices extend to the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, Western, Ashanti, and Brong Ahafo regions. CHRAJ, the Department of Social Welfare, and the National Commission for Civic Education agreed to investigate, but were hindered by a lack of resources and staff. At the end of the period covered by this report, no investigations were initiated.

As in the past, there were several cases of parents who denied minors medical treatment and polio immunization because medical assistance was incompatible with their religious beliefs. In April 2005, health personnel and volunteers were unable to vaccinate children for polio whose parents belonged to the Jesus Christ Apostolic Faith Church, at Agona Asafo in the Central Region, a church which has persistently refused to allow its children to be immunized. During the same month, government authorities took a 14-year-old girl from parents who belonged to this denomination when they would not allow their daughter to have an operation to remove a potentially fatal tumor. Following a court order secured by the Department of Social Welfare for her custody, a successful surgery was performed on the girl. She was being cared for by the Shelter for Abused Children at Osu. The shelter is under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare and receives funding from philanthropists.

Unlike in previous years when anti-Semitic statements were expressed in two of the country's weekly newspapers, no anti-Semitic statements were known to be reported throughout the country.

Relations across different Muslim groups continued to improve during the reporting period, particularly between the Tijanniya and Ahlussuna Muslim groups. In the past, relations between these two groups were contentious due to their doctrinal differences. Recently formed NGOs, such as the Coalition of Muslim Organizations and Ghana Congress of Religions and Peace, contributed to these improved relations by coordinating dialogues and collaborations amongst different Muslim groups.

The Coalition of Muslim Organizations(COMOG), an umbrella group for various Muslim organizations, was formed in 2001 to help strengthen relations and coordination amongst different Muslim groups. In 2005 COMOG held a National conference on public concerns regarding the handling of the Hajj, the annual Muslim pilgrimage. COMOG held two conferences during the reporting period on Muslim leadership and later held press events in connection with the Danish cartoon of Mohammed.

Improved relations between religious groups were also aided by the creation of the Ghana Congress of Religions and Peace (GCRP) in July 2005. Modeled after the World Congress of Religion and Peace, it is composed of Christian and Muslim leaders and aims to foster tolerance between these two religious groups. As part of its activities, the GCRP lobbied government on issues of religious freedom, family planning and anti-abortion laws, and campaigned for compassion for those afflicted with HIV/AIDS. As evidenced by the President's attendance of GCRP's inauguration ceremony, the GCRP is recognized by the Ghanaian government and enjoyed good relations with the Government 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.

Embassy officers continued to meet regularly with government and NGO contacts. In addition to mediating the case of SDA students at the University of Ghana, embassy officials worked with these contacts to promote and monitor religious freedom throughout the country. In June 2006, for example, an embassy official visited a "witch camp" in Gambaga in Northern Ghana as part of a religious freedom outreach effort.

Outreach to the Muslim community, which suffers from poor economic and social conditions for reasons independent of their religion, has been a focal point of the U.S. embassy's activities since 2002.

In late 2005, 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 ambassador hosted a large Iftar at her residence to which representatives from all Muslim sects were invited. In a symbolic act of tolerance and acceptance, the Ambassador met with Muslim members of the mainstream Tijaniya group as well as with members of the Amadias, who are often shunned by Tijaniyas, during another iftar in Wa. In Tamale, a Catholic priest also spoke publicly about promoting good Muslim-Christian relations during another embassy-sponsored iftar.

Since 2002, outreach to the Muslim community, which suffers from poor economic and social conditions for reasons independent of their religious beliefs and practice, has been a focal point of the embassy's activities. Under this framework, embassy officers attended Muslim functions and hosted several events with Muslims leaders in the Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale regions. These events served to promote interfaith dialogue and raise awareness of potential programming opportunities with the

United States that would benefit Muslims in their communities. Among the programs discussed and implemented was the International Visitors program—a U.S State Department initiative which sponsored the travel of several Muslims to the United States. Through the program, participants were exposed to forms of promoting religious tolerance within diverse communities. Under its Democracy and Governance program, USAID also worked in collaboration with the embassy, Muslim leaders, and communities in Kumasi to improve their capacity to work effectively with local government officials on key development issues affecting local Muslim populations.

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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, the Government reportedly favored Muslims over non-Muslims.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 94,926 square miles, and its population is an estimated 9.2 million. Islam is demographically, socially, and culturally the dominant religion. According to credible estimates, approximately 85 percent of the population adhered to Islam, 10 percent followed various Christian faiths, and 5 percent held traditional indigenous beliefs. Muslims generally adhered to the Sunni branch of Islam; there were relatively few adherents of the Shi'a branch, although they were increasing in number. Among the Christian groups, there were Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and other Christian evangelical groups active in the country and recognized by the Government. There was a small Baha'i community. There were small numbers of Hindus, Buddhists, and practitioners of traditional Chinese religions among the expatriate community. Few citizens, if any, professed atheism.

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

No data were 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 Ministry of the National Islamic League estimated that more than 70 percent of Muslims practiced their faith regularly.

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

Foreign missionary groups were active in the country and included Catholic, Philafricaine, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, and many U.S. missionary societies.

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, some believed the Government favors Muslims over non-Muslims through its support of the Ministry of the National Islamic League.

Both Muslim and Christian holy days are recognized by the Government and celebrated by the population. 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. On August 20, 2005, President Conte signed the decree authorizing private radio and television broadcasting but prohibiting ownership by religious groups or political parties. The Ministry of Information confirmed, however, that religious and political broadcasting would be permitted on privately owned, commercial radio. The Government allocated seventy-five minutes per week for both Muslim and Christian programming on state-owned, national television.

All religious groups newly operating in the country are required to register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration. 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 government expulsion, a penalty with limited opportunity for legal appeal. In practice, no groups have been expelled.

Islamic organizations are also required to register with the Ministry of the National Islamic League. The ministry reported that 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 Territorial Administration.

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

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

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

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to require foreign members of missionary and church groups, without diplomatic status, to pay a visa fee. The past policy of waiving visa fees for members of church groups no longer applied.

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

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

There are a few scattered madrassahs across the country, schools usually associated with a mosque. Private radical Islamic groups sponsored some of these schools 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 education component for Christians.

The Government did not have a specific program to promote interfaith understanding. The former government Inter-Religious Council, composed of members from Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant churches and the Ministry of the National Islamic League, suspended its activities. However, 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

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

Government support of Islam through the Ministry of the National Islamic League led some non-Muslims to claim the Government uses its influence to favor Muslims over non-Muslims. The Government sometimes provides assistance such as vehicles and lodging for events involving other faith groups, and it has approved funding for members of the Association of Churches and Evangelic Missions in Guinea. However, some were dissatisfied that no official governmental entity existed for non-Muslim religions. Non-Muslims were represented 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

Relations among the various religious groups generally were amicable; 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 sometimes limited or retarded efforts to acquire land for religious use by other faiths.

In October 2005 there was religiously motivated violence between the predominantly Muslim Koniankes and the predominantly Christian Guerzes in N'Zerekore in the Forest Region. During Ramadan, violence erupted after the Koniankes complained that music from a Guerze baptism disturbed prayers at a nearby mosque. Several persons were injured and property destroyed, and police detained approximately fifty persons. Some of the detainees were held for approximately two weeks and charged with disorderly conduct. All were released, some only after repair costs were reimbursed, and some had legal cases pending.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy maintains contact with clergy and religious leaders from all major religious communities and monitors developments affecting religious freedom. The mission initiated a partnership with the Ministry of the National Islamic League and representatives from both organizations meet 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 includes members of the Islamic League in public outreach programming because mosques play an important role in disseminating information in local communities. The embassy distributed remaining copies of the U.S. government-sponsored Arabic language magazine Hi to imams and mosques and a former International Visitor Program grantee moderated a program to introduce Hi Magazine to community leaders and

students. The director of the Islamic Center in Kankan gave an interview to Rural Radio and a lecture in Malinke language about his very positive experience on an International Visitor program on leadership in the Muslim community. A particularly intense debate on ways to foster mutual understanding was launched within the forum of an embassy-sponsored book discussion.

The ambassador and other U.S. officials raised religious freedom concerns with the Minister of the National Islamic League, the senior imam of Conakry, and religious leaders outside the capital.

GUINEA-BISSAU

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

There was little change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, in March 2005, the Government prohibited Ahmadiyya activity in the country.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. In 2005 a dispute between local Muslims and Ahmadis in the city of Gabu resulted in injuries to four Ahmadis. There has been no violence since.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 13,948 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.5 million. An estimated 38 to 45 percent of the population was Muslim; and between 5 and 13 percent was Christian. The remainder of the population followed traditional indigenous or animist religious practices. There were few atheists.

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

Missionaries from numerous Christian denominations operated 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 sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. Members of all major faiths were 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 has not refused any applications. There were no reports that new applications were made during the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, in March 2005, following a dispute in the previous month between Muslims and members of the Ahmadiyya faith in the eastern city of Gabu, the Government prohibited Ahmadi activity, contending that Ahmadi activities, including the group's practice of paying locals to attend services, were disruptive.

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

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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The embassy maintained relations with leaders of major religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and missionary groups in the country, including the National Islamic Council and the Catholic bishops. Two Qur'anic schoolteachers have participated in the embassy's English Language Program and a third was scheduled for the summer of 2006. 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 Visitors 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 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, although some Muslims perceived themselves to be treated as second-class citizens in a predominantly Christian country. There were some interfaith movements, but the Ufungamano Initiative, which previously grouped Muslims and Christians, included only Christians.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 225,000 square miles and a population of 34.7 million; approximately 88 percent lived in rural areas. Protestants were the largest religious group, representing approximately 45 percent of the population. Roman Catholics represented 33 percent of the population. Ten percent of the population practiced Islam, 1 percent practiced Hinduism, and the remainder followed various traditional indigenous religions or offshoots of Christian religions. There were very few atheists. Some sources disputed these figures; Muslim groups often claimed to represent 15 to 20 percent of the population, sometimes even more. Other sources also considered the 10 percent figure too low.

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

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

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, which was under review at the end of the period covered by this report. Muslim groups have also voiced concerns regarding a proposed antiterrorism bill and government assistance to Islamic schools.

The constitution and the Kadhis' Courts Act of 1967 established a venue to have certain types of civil cases adjudicated based on Islamic law. The constitution provides for the establishment of Kadhis' courts where "all the parties profess the Muslim religion" in suits addressing "questions of Muslim law relating to personal status, marriage, divorce, or inheritance." 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 to the High Court.

The Kadhis' courts issue continued to generate controversy. A proposed draft constitution, defeated during the November 2005 referendum, retained Kadhis' courts as subordinate courts with essentially the same jurisdictions as are included in the current constitution. The referendum debate included heated discussion of this issue with the Anglican Church of Kenya in June 2005 specifically announcing its opposition to Kadhis' courts, arguing that including Kadhis' courts in the constitution would give preferential treatment to Muslims.

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

In 2003 the Government published the Suppression of Terrorism Bill. Many observers, including the National Council of Churches of Kenya, found the bill objectionable on human rights grounds, arguing that it contained provisions that violate the constitution. Muslim leaders argued that the bill specifically targets their community. In June 2004 the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya, referring to the arrest of thirty Muslims on terrorism charges, accused the Government of targeting Muslims and applying the bill as if it were law. A new bill was drafted in May 2006, but Muslims and human rights activists continued to argue that the bill would inevitably discriminate against Muslims.

The Government requires new religious organizations to register with the Registrar of Societies, which reports to the Office of the Attorney General. The Government allows traditional indigenous religious organizations to register, although many choose not to do so. Once registered, religious organizations may apply for tax-exempt status, including exemption from paying duty on imported goods. Although some religious organizations disagree, the Government does not use tax laws to favor one religious group over another. 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.

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

Islamic and Hindu institutions sponsor a few public schools that the Government supports through payment of teachers' salaries and the provision of equipment. Some Muslims have expressed concern that the lack of a university in Coast Province, which has a large Muslim population, hinders educational opportunities for Muslims; however, higher education is available to Muslim students in other regions. In the past some Muslims voiced opposition to a government program, fi-

nanced in part by the U.S. government, which works with Islamic schools to improve the quality and efficiency of primary education. They charged that the aim of this program is to dilute the teaching of "true" Islam.

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, some Muslim leaders charged that the Government is hostile toward Muslims. The leaders claimed that, since the 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, the 2002 terrorist attacks in Mombasa, and terrorist attacks elsewhere, government discrimination against their community has worsened, especially demands for identity documents. According to these leaders, authorities more rigorously scrutinize the identification cards of persons with Muslim surnames and sometimes require additional documentation of citizenship, such as birth certificates of parents and even grandparents. The Government stated that this heightened scrutiny is an attempt to deter illegal immigration rather than 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 understood widely to encompass attempts to harm others not only by magic but also by covert means such as poisons. Although many traditional indigenous religions include or accommodate belief in the efficacy of witchcraft, they generally approve of harmful witchcraft only for defensive or retaliatory purposes and purport to offer protection against it.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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

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

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 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.

For years Muslims and Christians have held an open debate over their respective places in society, at times undermining mutual trust. Each group claims to have a larger number of adherents than is plausible, and some Muslim groups believe that the Government and business communities deliberately impede development in predominantly Muslim areas.

On May 13, 2006, masked gunmen stormed Hope FM, a radio station headquartered at Nairobi Pentecostal Church, killing one person, shooting three others, and setting the property on fire. At the end of the period covered by this report, officials had not concluded whether the attack was motivated by religious intolerance. The investigation was ongoing.

An April 7, 2006, media report indicated that three AIC missionaries had been expelled from Wajir, a predominantly Muslim area in the North Eastern Province, for proselytizing and allegedly converting thirty persons to Christianity. There were no further developments in this case at the end of the period covered by this report.

In April 2004 a mob killed a man in Mt. Elgon whom they accused of practicing witchcraft. Villagers claimed they had found witchcraft paraphernalia in the man's house and blamed him for the death of 810 persons. In June 2005 a couple was arrested in Western Kenya under the Witchcraft Act for allegedly possessing charms. Unlike similar cases in past years, no one alleged that these incidents were politically motivated. No further action was reported in either of these cases.

In December 2005 two persons appeared in court for the alleged murder in early November of two family members whom they suspected of practicing witchcraft. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

There were no further developments in the May 2004 case in which police arrested a Nigerian pastor, a prominent doctor, and six other members of Winners Chapel International in the Western Province town of Kitale and charged them with torturing a church member. Local newspapers alleged that the man was tortured to force him to give up his child as a human sacrifice.

There have been reports of intolerance, sometimes degenerating into physical assaults, among refugee groups in the country. Some instances have been sparked by perceived violations of Somali traditions on marriage and dress.

There have been efforts to bridge religious divides drawing supporters from a broad spectrum of Christian, Hindu, and Muslim groups. The focus of these programs has been to promote interfaith dialogue, reduce ethnic conflict, and mitigate other societal problems such as female genital mutilation.

SECTION IV. U.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. Recognizing the key role of religious leaders and organizations during the constitutional referendum debate, the ambassador hosted a meeting with religious leaders to discuss issues affecting their communities.

The ambassador and embassy officials routinely travel throughout the country to meet with religious and community leaders to facilitate dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. government also provides grants to many communities that, for historical and religious reasons, perceive themselves to have been marginalized by previous governments. These grants include support for civic action programs that build and repair schools in Muslim and other marginalized areas.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,720 square miles, and the Government reported that its population was 1.8 million.

Christianity was the dominant religion. The Christian Council of Lesotho, made up of representatives of all major Christian churches in the country, estimated that approximately 90 percent of the population was Christian. Roman Catholics represented 45 percent of the population, Lesotho Evangelical 26 percent, and Anglican and other Christian denominations an additional 19 percent. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and members of traditional indigenous religions comprised the remaining 10 percent of the population.

While Christians could be found throughout the country, Muslims lived mainly in the northeast. Most practitioners of Islam were of Asian origin, while the majority

of Christians were the indigenous Basotho. Many Christians practiced their traditional cultural beliefs and rituals along with Christianity. The Catholic Church has fused some aspects of local culture into its services; for example, the singing of hymns during services has developed into a traditional call and response in Sesotho—the indigenous language—as well as English. In addition, priests dressed in traditional local attire during services. The pre-Christian indigenous religion, whose priesthood is called Songoma, influenced all religious practices.

The Muslim community had seven small mosques. With the assistance of the Libyan embassy, the community tried to build a larger mosque, training center, and madrassah; however, the community claimed it was hindered by bureaucratic delays.

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

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 over education policy. However, the influence of the Catholic Church has decreased in recent years, and it now owns less than 40 percent of all primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Education pays and certifies all teachers, and 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.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Mutual understanding and cooperation between Christians and Muslims is the norm. There were ecumenical efforts to promote tolerance and cooperation on social 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. The U.S. embassy and local reli-

gious leaders discussed their roles in maintaining political peace and assisting with the consolidation of democracy.

LIBERIA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The period of this report covers two governments: The National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), an interim administration composed of members of previously warring factions that served from October 2003 to December 2006, and the democratically elected government installed on January 16, 2006.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Despite frequent interaction among religious groups, some tension remained evident. Some in the Muslim minority complained that Christian holy days are observed by the Government as public holidays but Muslim holy days are not. Some Muslims were dissatisfied with the Government's decision to keep shops and markets closed on Sundays. Land disputes between Mandingos and other ethnic groups in Lofa, Nimba, and Bong counties were being resolved; and no violence erupted surrounding any of these problems. The October 2004 three-day rioting, in which several mosques and churches were destroyed, was not repeated. A commission was established to investigate the October incident, and while the report was not made public, the proximate cause of the rioting was believed to be a land dispute, not a religiously motivated attack. No rioting since October 2004 resulted in the destruction of churches or mosques.

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 and by meeting regularly with prominent members of various religious communities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

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

Christian denominations included the Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and AME Zion denominations, Seventh-day Adventists, and a variety of Pentecostal churches. Some of the Pentecostal movements were affiliated with churches outside the country, while others were independent.

The Muslim population was mainly from the Mandingo and Vai ethnic groups, which were found predominantly in the west. Ethnic groups throughout the country participated in the traditional religious practices of the Poro and Sande secret societies. Christians lived throughout the country.

A large number of foreign missionary groups worked 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 sought at all levels 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 were several Muslim deputies and assistant ministers and approximately ten Muslim members in the legislature.

Major Christian holy days, including Fast and Prayer Day, Easter, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas, are observed as national holidays, while Islamic holy days are not. The 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 Govern-

ment 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. Traditional indigenous religious groups are not required to register and generally do not.

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

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.

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 there is need for greater representation within the Government. Some Muslim leaders felt that certain Muslim holidays should be celebrated by the Government, since many Christian holidays are celebrated.

High-level government officials were required to take oaths when assuming their new office. Christians kissed the Bible, and Muslims kissed the Qu'ran.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions contributed to religious freedom. The Inter-Religious Council promotes dialogue among various religious communities.

In October 2004 a property dispute escalated into widespread violence between Mandingos, who are predominantly Muslim, and other predominantly Christian ethnic groups. The violence broke out in Monrovia and spread to Kakata and other nearby towns and villages. At least twenty-five persons were killed, and several mosques and churches were looted and burned. The United Nations Peacekeepers (UNMIL) brought the situation under control after three days. The violence was widely regarded as a reflection of a land dispute with ethnic overtones rather than religious tensions.

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

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 available about traditional religions associated with ritual killings, and the number of such killings was difficult to ascertain. Many believe that practitioners of traditional indigenous religions among the Grebo and Krahn, who are concentrated in the southeast, engage in ritual killings. Body parts of a person believed to be powerful are considered the most effective for ritual purposes. In some cases, the rituals reportedly involve eating body parts to gain special powers. Fighters on all sides of the civil war reportedly engaged in such practices. Most reports of ritual killings came from Southeastern counties.

SECTION IV. U.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 for Christian and Muslim leaders to discuss religious freedom issues. 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 228,880 square miles, and its population is approximately 17.5 million. Although precise official figures were unavailable, approximately half of the population was Christian. There were four main Christian denominations. The Roman Catholic Church was the largest denomination, followed by the Reformed Protestant Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). President Ravalomanana was re-elected to a second term as lay vice-president of the FJKM in August 2004. The Lutheran and Anglican Churches accounted for most of the remainder of the country's Christians. Most other citizens followed traditional indigenous religions. Muslims constituted 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 was a small number of Hindus among the ethnic Indians. The country had a very small Jewish population.

There were several foreign missionary groups that operated freely. Most of these were Christian and include Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Several faith-based organizations, some with international affiliations, were 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. There is no state religion. President Ravalomanana has occasionally expressed a desire to transform the country into "a Christian state"; however, there has been no attempt to establish a state religion, and most believe his comments indicated a desire to enshrine Christian principles in the day-to-day life of the country.

The law mandates that religious organizations register with the Ministry of Interior. By registering, religious organizations acquire the legal status necessary to receive direct bequests and other gifts. To qualify as a religious association, groups must consist of at least one hundred members, with an elected administrative council of no more than nine 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 one thousand members, the administrative council may apply to be recognized as a church. The state officially recognizes nine churches and 104 religious organizations.

Religious organizations that fail to meet the Ministry of Interior's registration requirements are free to register as simple associations. Simple associations do not have the right to receive gifts or hold religious services. In 2004, ministry officials estimated there were more than one thousand religious organizations in the country operating without official state recognition, including both simple associations and unregistered organizations.

The Malagasy Council of Christian Churches (FFKM) is the umbrella organization for the country's four principal Christian denominations. The FFKM is composed of the Roman Catholic, FJKM, Lutheran, and Anglican Churches, and is a key player in a broad range of issues. The FFKM is a traditional leader in education. Recently its role has expanded to include coordinating a national campaign against HIV/AIDS and monitoring elections. In the political arena, the FFKM has generally served as a mediator, bringing together antagonistic factions; however, it has occasionally taken an overt position on political issues. During the 2001 presidential campaign and the ensuing political crisis, it supported Marc Ravalomanana, then mayor of Antananarivo, in his ultimately successful bid for the presidency. President

Ravalomanana's position as a lay vice-president of FJKM still generates some allegations that church and state interests are not kept entirely separate. In April 2005 President Ravalomanana was criticized on these grounds following his keynote speech at a three-day World Bank-sponsored FJKM colloquium on the role of church leaders in the country's development.

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Numerous religious organizations operate freely in all regions of the country, often disseminating their message through public and private media. Religious organizations are granted free access to state-run media provided that their use constitutes a public service. During the month of Ramadan, for example, the national television station broadcast a daily fifteen-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.

On September 16, 2005 the Government banned the New Protestant Church in Madagascar (FPVM), led by Pastor Randrianatoandro, for illegally occupying churches assigned to the mainstream Reformed Protestant Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM); the ban was implemented in November. The FPVM broke away from the FJKM church in 2002 and took approximately 300,000 worshippers with it. The FPVM claimed the owners offered the buildings, most of which were wood and thatch huts, to the church. The FPVM challenged the ban in court, which refused to rule on the ban, charging that only President Ravalomanana could overturn the decision to ban a church. President Ravalomanana was a lay vice president in the FJKM, and some observers charged that the closure of the church was politically motivated. The FPVM appealed, and on April 19, 2006, the Supreme Court issued an order requiring the Government to provide proof of the basis for the ban by May 19, 2006. As of June 15, 2006, the Government had not replied to the Supreme Court's order.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (EURD), banned on January 11, 2005, for failure to properly register, was not permitted to reopen. The Government expelled all foreign EURD pastors. Soon after the church was banned, the Ministry of Interior confirmed receipt of several petitions from former EURD congregations to form a new official religious organization. The ministry stated that as long as the applications fulfilled the legal requirement of having Malagasy leadership, they would likely be approved. Former members of banned organizations face higher scrutiny when petitioning for recognition as an official religious organization. Nonetheless, the ministry approved six new religious organizations since the abolition of the EURD in 2005.

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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the embassy regularly meet with leaders of religious communities, including minority groups. In April 2006 representatives of the embassy met with leaders of the Muslim community to discuss their concerns about inclusion in Malagasy political life. The embassy provided materials to a small library at a major mosque in Antananarivo.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; 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 its population is approximately eleven million. More than 70 percent of the population was Christian. Among the Christian denominations, the largest were the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), with smaller numbers of Anglicans, Baptists, evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists. There was a substantial Muslim minority totaling approximately 20 percent of the population. The vast majority of Muslims were Sunni, adhering to either the Qadriya or Sukkutu groups. There were also Hindus, Baha'is, a small number of Rastafarians, and followers of traditional indigenous religions. There were few atheists.

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

Regional voting trends and political affiliation sometimes reflected the concentration of faiths in certain regions of the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

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

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

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In May 2005 the Government and Rastafarian leaders came into conflict over an unofficial ban on long hair in public schools. Although there is no law relating to hair length, some schools prohibited long hair as part of their dress code. Students who do not comply risk suspension. The Rastafarian community, citing long dreadlocks as an expression of religion, called the ban discriminatory and threatened legal action. Government officials declared the prohibition was against long hair, not dreadlocks, and was not intended to infringe upon any religious rights.

Religious leaders were free to speak publicly on political and social 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; 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 the presidential and parliamentary elections in May 2004 and again in 2006 following an attempt by the country's Christian president to remove the Muslim vice president from office. Christians and Muslims generally coexisted peacefully, often participating in business or civil service organizations together. A small Hindu minority also participated in business and civil society.

In November 2004 a dispute between Muslims and Christians erupted over the proper burial rites for mixed-religion families. Following the death of a child whose Christian parents hailed from a Muslim-dominated community, religious leaders and relatives on both sides advocated for their views on burial rites. The dispute allegedly resulted in violence and vandalism after a series of inflammatory remarks. A Christian preacher was allegedly assaulted in the incident, and in May 2005 several suspects were in custody awaiting trial for assault and malicious damage. No further action was taken in the case. The trial had not been scheduled. The case remained unresolved at the end of the reporting period.

During the 2004 presidential and parliamentary campaign, some prominent Christian religious leaders frequently spoke about corruption, the electoral process, and the candidates. The church leaders were often openly critical of the ruling political party, and candidates and officials took issue with the churches' statements. The Government did not attempt to restrict remarks of religious leaders; however, it declared that such statements deviated from the proper role of religious leaders. Churches continued to be a significant source of political influence, particularly in rural areas.

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

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

Political and community leaders have made active efforts to foster cooperation among religious groups. For example, in 2004 presidential and parliamentary candidates of various religious backgrounds attended a series of "Presidential Prayer Breakfasts" organized by a Christian group. Other invited guests included Muslim leaders, the diplomatic community, and civil society leaders. In January 2006 the Government held a national symposium to promote religious tolerance and dialogue.

The Public Affairs Committee (PAC), a nonprofit and politically unaligned local organization, was involved prominently in promoting religious tolerance, civic education, and human rights, and was also active in monitoring the 2004 electoral process. PAC included representatives of various churches and mosques. In 2005 PAC launched a national program to sensitize religious leaders on the importance of religious tolerance and unity among persons of all faiths.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by this report, the embassy continued to promote religious tolerance through grants, meetings, exchange programs, and the distribution of reading materials. In July 2005 USAID provided funding for an eighteen-month project to introduce and reinforce messages of interfaith tolerance and appreciation through radio dramas, talk shows, and associated listener clubs and journalism awards. This activity, which targeted divisions between Christian and Muslim com-

munities, built on the experience of a previous successful USAID project focused on civic education. In 2004 the embassy sponsored a local Muslim group's project to encourage interfaith civic education and participation among rural persons of all faiths.

On several occasions, embassy officials appeared on local radio programs, including a Radio Islam program, to discuss issues of religious freedom and tolerance. Two Muslim journalists from Radio Islam and The Daily Times newspaper traveled to the United States in 2004 on a U.S. government-sponsored reporting tour concerning religious freedom in America. Upon returning to the country, the two published positive accounts of their experiences.

American Imam Darryl Wainwright participated in a ten-day speaker program in October 2005 that reached a large portion of the Muslim community. He delivered important messages about religious tolerance, education, and self-reliance that were well received.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

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

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

Foreign Islamic preachers operated in the north, while mosques associated with Dawa (an Islamic fundamentalist group) were located in Kidal, Mopti, and Bamako. Dawa has gained some adherents among unemployed youth living in poorer neighborhoods. However, the Dawa group's influence in Kidal was less evident than in the previous years. The Wahhabi movement has grown in Timbuktu and Sikasso. In general, the country's traditional approach to Islam was peaceful and moderate.

Foreign missionary groups operated in the country. The most numerous were Christian groups based in Europe that engaged in development work, primarily the provision of health care and education. A number of U.S.-based Christian missionary groups also were 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 sought at all levels 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. Traditional indigenous religions are not required to register.

Foreign missionary groups operated without government interference, and they did not link the benefits of their development activities to conversion. Members of various religious groups were allowed to proselytize freely.

Laws pertaining to marriage and divorce are based on French legal models. Inheritance laws reflect a mixture of local, French, and Islamic influences.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Adherents of different faiths may be found within the same family. Followers of one religion attend religious ceremonies of other religious groups, especially weddings, baptisms, and funerals.

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.

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

Islam as practiced in the country is generally tolerant and adapted to local conditions.

In May 2005 eleven Muslims were convicted of resisting authority, disobedience, and rebellion, and sentenced to jail terms ranging from six months to three years for refusing to allow their children to receive polio vaccinations. The group to which they belonged was gaining adherents in the region and was viewed as a serious threat to the polio eradication program since its members are taught to believe that matters pertaining to health should remain in God's hands.

In August 2003 in the village of Yerere, traditional Sunni practitioners attacked Wahhabi Sunnis who were building an authorized mosque. Nine persons died and two were seriously wounded. The Government viewed the case as a serious breach of religious freedom. On April 11, 2005, a criminal court sentenced five of ninety-six defendants to death. Although courts can sentence individuals to death, the Government does not carry out death sentences in practice. Ten defendants were sentenced to life in prison, ten others received sentences ranging from two to ten years, and eighteen female defendants received eight months' to two years' imprisonment. Forty-one others received suspended sentences, and twelve persons were acquitted.

In November 2003 an individual vandalized a statue of the Virgin Mary, shortly before the annual Catholic pilgrimage to the town of Kita. Local authorities quickly responded to the incident, and the responsible individual was arrested and prosecuted. Investigations revealed that he acted independently. The court sentenced him to three years in prison and ordered him to pay a fine.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers meet regularly with religious authorities and government officials who deal with these issues. Embassy officials expanded dialogue with Muslim groups to promote religious freedom, mutual understanding, and the continued secularism of the Government. The embassy maintains contact with the foreign missionary community and works with government officials and societal leaders to promote religious freedom.

MAURITANIA

The constitution establishes the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the religion of its citizens and the state. However, a military junta took power on August 3, 2005, overthrew the elected president, dissolved parliament, suspended parts of the constitution, and formed a transitional government. The transitional government maintained laws regarding human rights and religious freedom and made some advances in both areas. Both the former and transitional governments limited freedom of religion by prohibiting the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the proselytization of Muslims.

There were some changes in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 419,212 square miles, and its population is approximately 3 million. Almost the entire population practiced Sunni Islam. There was a very small number of non-Muslims and Roman Catholic or denominational Christian churches in Nouakchott, Atar, Zouerate, Nouadhibou, and Rosso. Although there were no synagogues, a very small number of expatriates practiced 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 NGOs included World Advocates and Caritas, each providing various services including the provision of medical care, feeding centers, micro-finance and water treatment.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution establishes the country as an Islamic republic and recognizes Islam as the religion of its citizens and the state. Both the former and transitional governments limited freedom of religion by prohibiting the distribution of non-Islamic religious materials and the proselytization of Muslims; however, non-Muslim resident expatriates and a few non-Muslim citizens generally practiced their religions openly and freely.

Both the former and transitional governments and citizenry consider Islam to be the essential cohesive element unifying the country's various ethnic groups. There is a cabinet-level Ministry of Literacy Programs, Islamic Orientation, and Traditional Education. The High Council of Islam, consisting of six imams, advised the former and transitional governments on the conformance of legislation to Islamic precepts. Although the former and transitional governments provided a small stipend to the imam of the Central Mosque in the capital, mosques and Qur'anic schools were normally supported by their members and other donors.

The former and transitional 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. Nonprofit organizations, including both religious groups and secular NGOs, generally are not subject to taxation. The judiciary consists of a single system of courts with a modernized legal system that conforms with the principles of Shari'a (Islamic law).

The former and transitional governments observed Muslim holy days as national holidays, but this practice did not negatively affect other religious groups. A magistrate of Shari'a, who heads a separate government commission, determines the lunar dates for observing religious holidays and addresses the nation on these days.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The implementation of Islamic law has created some limited restrictions on religious freedom. Shari'a, proclaimed the law of the land under a previous government in 1983, includes the Qur'anic prohibition against apostasy or conversion to a religion other than Islam; however, this prohibition had never been codified in civil law or enforced. The small number of known converts from Islam suffered no social ostracism, and there were no reports of societal or governmental attempts to punish them during the period covered by this report.

Although there is no specific legal prohibition against proselytizing by non-Muslims, in practice the former government prohibited such activity through the use of

Article 11 of the Press Act. The act bans the publication of any material that is against, contradicts, or otherwise threatens Islamic principles. The former government viewed any attempts by practitioners of other religions to convert Muslims as undermining society. 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 government 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.

Under Article 11, the former government could restrict the importation, printing, or public distribution of Bibles or other non-Islamic religious literature. In practice, Bibles were neither printed nor publicly sold in the country; however, the possession of Bibles and other non-Islamic religious materials in private homes was not illegal, and Bibles and other religious publications were available among the small non-Islamic communities.

Except for the president, the members of the five-person Constitutional Council, and the ten-person High Council of Magistrates over which the president presides, government employees or members of the ruling political party are not required to take a religious oath. The Constitutional Council and the High Council of Magistrates advise the president in matters of law and the constitution. The oath of office includes a promise to God to uphold the law of the land in conformity with Islamic precepts. However, since the August 2005 coup, the country has not had a president or an active Constitutional Council. Instead, the Military Council for Justice and Democracy, headed by Colonel Ely Ould Mohammed Fal, has held power. In April 2006 the council approved certain constitutional amendments that were overwhelmingly approved by voters in a national constitutional referendum held June 25. One amendment established a presidential oath of office taken in the name of God.

Both the privately run Qur'anic schools and the Government's public schools include classes on religion. These classes teach the history and principles of Islam and the classical Arabic of the Qur'an. Although attendance at these religious classes is ostensibly required, many students, the great majority of whom were Muslims, decline to attend them for diverse ethnolinguistic and religious reasons. Since these classes determine a disproportionately small percentage of the overall grade, students are able to advance in school and graduate with diplomas, provided they compensate for their failure to attend the religion classes by their performance in other classes.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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

From March to July of 2005, the former government detained approximately eighty Islamists, including Islamist leaders Cheikh Mohamed El Hacen Ould Dedew and Moctar Ould Mohamed Moussa, who it claimed were tied to terrorism. On May 28, 2005, the former government charged thirty-seven with membership in unrecognized groups or for inciting violence and making harmful political statements at mosques. The former government released fourteen others, leaving sixty-six in prison (thirty-seven of whom had been charged). A majority of the arrests appeared to be based on alleged political activities rather than religious beliefs. The transitional government released twenty-one of the sixty-six Islamists soon after assuming power, and on September 2, 2005, released an additional twenty-four for lack of evidence, leaving twenty-one in prison. Three prisoners escaped April 27, 2006, leaving eighteen in prison. The transitional government stated that it had sufficient evidence to hold the remaining eighteen for terrorist activities and was preparing its case against them at the end of the reporting period.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports of former or transitional government officials searching mosques, seizing Qur'anic texts or arresting mosque officials. As in the previous reporting period, both the former and transitional 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.

In late 2005 a western citizen was arrested and detained for forty-eight hours by transitional government authorities for distributing non-Islamic religious materials

to citizens. Several weeks after his release the individual was rearrested for continued possession of non-Islamic religious materials and was expelled from the country.

As in the previous reporting period, after police told four small Protestant groups to stop meeting in members' homes until they received official recognition, the transitional government continued to restrict such meetings.

There were some instances where persons were detained for questioning in connection with an investigation into proselytizing, but they were released within days without charges.

No non-Islamic groups have ever been recognized, including the Catholic Church, which operates openly in its facility in Nouakchott.

Shari'a law provides the legal principles upon which the country's law and legal procedure are based. The testimony of two women is necessary to equal that of one man. In addition, in awarding an indemnity to the family of a woman who has been killed, the courts grant only half the amount that they would award for a man's death. For commercial and other issues not addressed specifically by Shari'a, the law and courts treat women and men equally.

Excluding 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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There were no reported incidents of interreligious violence during this period. Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no reports of public protests conducted against the Government's continued recognition of Israel. However, such protests were planned for July 2 and 4, 2006.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom issues with the former and transitional governments as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. embassy monitors developments affecting religious freedom and maintains contact with imams and the leaders of other religious groups. These contacts include the Minister of Islamic Orientation, Literacy Programs, and Traditional Education.

The U.S. ambassador actively engages prominent religious leaders in a dialogue to broaden mutual understanding of religious freedom principles and to explain the freedom with which Muslims practice their religion in America.

As part of its continuing efforts to promote religious tolerance, the embassy brought an American imam to the country for a week-long visit in January and February 2006. During his visit the imam met with several civil and religious leaders to discuss how Islam is practiced freely in the United States. As part of his visit, the imam was invited to participate as a keynote speaker at a conference to promote dialogue and understanding within the Islamic community. The ambassador continues to meet frequently with many different Islamic leaders to promote dialogue. The embassy also has expanded its outreach efforts to Qur'anic schools.

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

Occasional 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 its population was approximately 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 faith. There were no official figures for those who actively practiced their faith, but there were estimates that the figure was approximately 60 percent for all religious groups.

Approximately 73 percent of Christians were Roman Catholic. The remaining 27 percent were members of the following subgroups: 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 accounted for more than 90 percent of Muslims; there were some Shi'a Muslims. Many Buddhists were also practicing Catholics, and many citizens of Chinese ancestry sent their children to the Loreto Convent primary schools in the major towns, which were managed by the Catholic diocese.

The north was more Hindu, and the south was more Catholic. There also were large populations of Muslims and Catholics in the main cities of Port Louis, Quatre Bornes, and Curepipe. Most mosques and churches were concentrated in these areas. The offshore island of Rodrigues, with a population of approximately 36,000, was 92 percent Catholic.

The country is a small island nation, and its ethnic groups, known as "communal groups," are tightly knit. Intermarriage was not common, although the most recent census indicated that it was increasing. An individual's name usually identified his or her ethnic and religious background. There was a strong correlation between religious affiliation and ethnicity. Citizens of Indian ethnicity usually were Hindus or Muslims. Those of Chinese ancestry generally practiced both Buddhism and Catholicism. Creoles and citizens of European descent usually were Catholic.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Baptist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, operated 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.

Religious organizations that were present prior to independence, such as the Catholic Church, the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church, the Seventh-day Adventists, Hindus, and Muslims, are recognized in a parliamentary decree. These groups also receive an annual lump-sum payment from the Ministry of Finance based upon the number of adherents as determined by the census. Newer religious organizations (which must have a minimum of seven members) 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 limits on the ability of missionaries to operate in the country, there are limits on the number of missionaries permitted to obtain the requisite visas and work permits. During the reporting period, the Government refused to grant work and residency permits to two Mormon missionaries. However, at least one other Mormon missionary received a work and residency permit.

National holidays are representative of the country's multireligious, multiethnic population. Hindu (Maha Shivratree, Ganesh Chathurthi, and Divvali), 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 components within the country and sponsored daylong events aimed at fostering cultural programs that included religious components. For the third consecutive year, the Ministry held daylong activities for Divali and Eid al-Fitr. The ministry also held a daylong celebration of Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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 the highest levels of government. Despite this sentiment, a member of the Franco-Mauritian minority, Paul Raymond Berenger, became prime minister through a prearranged agreement between the parties of the governing coalition in 2003, making him the first Christian prime minister of the country. Prime Minister Ramgoolam's first deputy prime minister was Muslim, the highest elected office ever held by a Muslim in the country.

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 the 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 five years (which would permit them to seek citizenship). Religious organizations were permitted to send 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2004 the Supreme Court ruled that religious beliefs should not be taken into account when pupils were admitted to publicly funded Catholic schools. As a result, the Catholic diocese, which administers the schools, no longer had a seat allocation policy giving preference to Catholic students.

The Council of Religions of Mauritius, consisting of religious leaders from each of the major religions, met several times during the period covered by this report to discuss interreligious harmony. The committee set as its goal the development of a greater understanding between religious groups. Following the July 2005 elections, the members of the council signed a document urging political parties to refrain from using religious platforms. In January 2005 the Council of Religions held a meeting to establish a plan of action against HIV/AIDS.

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. During the reporting period, the U.S. embassy conducted programs with several Muslim communities, including a visit from an American imam on nonviolence and Muslim life in America.

MOZAMBIQUE

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

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, the constitution bans religious faith-based political parties as threats to national unity.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 308,642 square miles, and its population is approximately 19.4 million. According to the most recent census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics in 1997, half of the population did not profess to practice a religion or creed; however, religious leaders believed that the census scheduled for 2007 would show that virtually all of these persons recognized or practiced some form of traditional indigenous religion. Of the approximately eight million persons who professed a recognized religion in the 1997 national survey, 24 percent were Roman Catholic, 22 percent were Protestant, and 20 percent were Muslim. Many Muslim leaders disagreed 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 country's population must be Muslim.

Religious communities were dispersed throughout the country. The northern provinces were most strongly Muslim, particularly along the coastal strip, but some areas of the northern interior were strongly Protestant or Catholic. Protestants and Catholics were more numerous in the southern and central regions, but Muslim minority populations could be found in these areas as well. Government sources stated that evangelical Christians represented the fastest growing religious group. Generally, religious communities tended to draw members from across ethnic, political, economic, and racial lines; however, the increasing immigrant population of South Asian origin was predominantly Muslim and followed the Hanafi school of Islamic Jurisprudence.

There were 722 religious denominations and 124 religious organizations registered with the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice. In the period covered by this report, fifty-one denominations and three religious organizations were registered. Major Christian denominations included Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Seventh-day Adventist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, Nazarene, and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as many other 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 Brazilian Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, established in Mozambique in 1993, has continued to make significant inroads in the expansion of its countrywide missionary network in addition to financial holdings. The Universal Church owns the Rede Miramar radio and television stations and various real estate holdings throughout the country.

The Government reported that no subgroups were registered under Islam; however, the vast majority of Muslims were Sunni, with the small Shi'a minority being principally of South Asian origin. The three principal Islamic organizations were the Mohammedan Community, Islamic Congress, and Islamic Council. The Kuwaiti-funded and Sudanese-managed NGO African Muslim Agency conducted humanitarian work as did the Muslim development agency Aga Khan. Muslim journalists reported that the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a was not particularly important for many local Muslims, and Muslims were much more likely to identify themselves by the local religious leader they followed than as Sunni or Shi'a. The country's Muslim population represented the four schools of thought in Islamic Law: Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, and Hanbali.

Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i groups were registered and constituted a very small percentage of the population.

The country's leading mosques and the Roman 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 Christian and Muslim adherents continue to incorporate traditional practices and rituals, and religious authorities have generally been permissive of such practices. For example, members of these faiths commonly travel to ancestors' graves to say special prayers for rain. Christians and Muslims continue to practice a ritual of preparation or inauguration at the time of important events (for example, before a first job, a school examination, or a swearing-in) by offering prayers and spilling beverages on the ground to please ancestors. Some Christians and Muslims consult curandeiros, traditional healers or spiritualists, some of whom themselves are nominal Christians or Muslims, in search of good luck, healing, and solutions to problems. Curandeiros are not recognized by the Ministry of Justice's Department of Religious Affairs as representing a distinct religious following.

Dozens of foreign missionary groups operated freely. Most were Protestant evangelical groups, but Islamic and Catholic missionaries were strongly represented as well. Protestant missionary presence was strongest in the south, but missionary

groups such as the Nampula-based Sociedade Internacional de Linguistica (International Linguistic Society), supported by the Christian Council of Mozambique, were expanding Bible translation projects in the north. Muslim missionaries from Egypt, Pakistan, and South Africa have established Islamic schools, known as madrassahs, in many cities and towns in the northern provinces, and provided scholarships for students from the south to study in their respective countries. Indian Muslim groups have also developed a significant missionary presence in recent years.

Two prominent Christian figures, Reverend Jamisse Taimo and Reverend Arao Litsure, have chaired the last three National Elections Commissions, in 1999, 2003, and 2004. In 2004 religious leaders also served as chairmen of provincial election commissions in many areas. While President Guebuza is Presbyterian, most prominent figures in the Government are Catholic; only two members of President Guebuza's cabinet are Muslim. However, all major religions and denominations are strongly represented in the National Assembly and in various government ministries.

SECTION 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 name and practice, the Government does not favor a particular religion, nor is there a state or dominant religion; however, Islamic leaders and journalists objected to what they say is silent discrimination against the Muslim community. They cite the example of the 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 insist that Ide should be made a national holiday if Christmas is observed de facto under the guise of family unification. In December 2005 President Guebuza swore into office the members of the newly created Council of State, an advisory body comprising well-known citizens representing various professions and organizations. As prescribed by law, in addition to the standing members, the president appointed four "personalities of recognized merit," and the Parliament elected seven more. The absence of any prominent Muslim leader on the council caused great controversy in the Islamic community, which believed that their contributions to the country's development warranted a place on the council. After the appointment of Catholic Cardinal Alexandre dos Santos, Muslim leaders complained that the Islamic community was being marginalized and favoritism was being demonstrated toward Christians.

The 1989 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 the registration process, and there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious group during the period covered by this report. The Christian Council 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. In 2003 and 2004, Islamic primary and secondary schools were established in the cities of Matola, Xai-Xai, Nampula, Nacala, and Pemba, many with financing from the African Muslim Agency or from prominent local Muslims, many of South Asian descent. Several other Islamic schools are under construction or rehabilitation in other cities. Many Protestant organizations have also opened primary and secondary schools in recent years, primarily in the central and northern provinces. On the university level, the Muslim community has financed the establishment of Mussa Bin Bique University in Nampula, which opened in 2002 and expanded in 2005. The Catholic University has educational facilities in Beira, Nampula, Cuamba, and Pemba. Religious instruction is a primary focus of the new primary and secondary schools, but the universities associated with religious denominations do not emphasize or even offer religious studies. In fact, many students at Catholic University branches are Muslim, particularly in Pemba. During this reporting period, the cardinal of Maputo inaugurated the new Sao Tomas University,

and the Catholic Church reported that enrollment is not faith-based. Religious instruction in public schools is strictly prohibited.

A conference of bishops meets regularly and sends pastoral letters documenting issues of national consequence to the president of the republic. Throughout the period covered by this report, Catholic and other Christian groups freely held seminars and participated in government health programs, such as vaccination and cholera awareness campaigns. In February 2006 President Guebuza presided over the four-day launch of his Presidential Initiative on the Fight Against HIV/AIDS. As part of the launch, he invited more than 100 religious leaders representing all faiths to talk about approaches to stem the growing pandemic. This marked the country's first government-initiated interfaith dialogue on an issue of national interest.

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.

In August 2004 the Government enacted a new Family Law, which replaced the colonial-era civil code and brought the law into compliance with equality provisions of the constitution. The new law raised the marriage age to eighteen for males and females, eliminated the husband's de facto status as head of the family, and legalized civil, religious, and common-law unions. The passage of the law was of particular consequence to the country's major religious faiths as it provided for state recognition of religious weddings for the first time in more than eighty years.

The law does not legally recognize polygyny; however, women in polygamous marriages are granted full marital and inheritance rights.

In May 2006 the Mohammedan Community constructed 150 houses for donation to families displaced by the devastating floods of 2000 and 2001. The $300,000 housing project based in Maputo province won widespread public praise for the scope of its charitable vision and did not exclude non-Muslims from receiving aid. The community planned to construct an additional 250 homes as well as a mosque, primary school, vocational school, orphanage, clinic, pharmacy, and well.

The Catholic Church continues to encourage the evolution of the country's political system principally on the provincial level. The Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM), established in 1948, plays a role in politics. After the Rome Peace Agreement that ended the country's sixteen-year civil war, the CCM's Peace and Reconciliation Committee began collecting and destroying hundreds of armaments and explosives in exchange for agricultural implements and construction materials. During the reporting period the CCM collected fifteen weapons and explosives in the southern region. The CCM also participates in the civil society organization Electoral Observatory, and takes part in key policy debates such as the National Poverty Alleviation Plan.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the law governing political parties specifically forbids religious parties from organizing and any party from sponsoring religious propaganda.

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, continue to remain unjustly 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; moreover, while the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restitution lies with the provincial government, it is the Directorate for Religious Affairs that is mandated to address the general issue of the restitution of church properties. Return of the properties often is delayed due to 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 a recourse to the judicial system than a process of collaboration.

In June 2004 fourteen American Protestant evangelical missionaries were expelled from the northern city of Montepuez; however, the reason for their expulsion was not religious, and they were able to reestablish missionary activities in other areas of the north.

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 religious groups generally are amicable, especially at the grassroots level. No religiously inspired altercations between members of different faiths were reported during this period. Within the Islamic community, the black and 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 increasing tensions.

In February 2006 a Maputo newspaper reprinted eight of the Danish cartoons that had sparked world controversy and widespread condemnation by Islamic groups. A protest staged largely by Muslims of South Asian ancestry turned violent in front of the newspaper's office building, and a Muslim journalist reported that the mob attacked black Muslims advocating for peaceful demonstrations and dialogue. While the Muslim community unified to boycott the paper for two months, black Muslims said that the facade of harmony hides the underlying tension and perception they were strong-armed into action. The Government issued a statement condemning the paper's decision to reprint the contentious cartoons and underscored the state's commitment to secular principles and religious freedom, but it did not comment on the violent protest.

Some black Muslims said that the Government's perceived inaction was part of a pattern of political favors being purchased by the wealthy Muslim community mostly comprising South Asians. Black Muslims also see as an indication of favoritism the Government's official acknowledgement of the date of the Ide Muslim festival recognized by the South Asians over the date recognized by the black Muslim leadership.

In October 2005 President Guebuza attended the inauguration ceremony of the country's second oldest mosque, the Mesquita Central da Baixa, originally constructed in 1903. Controversy surrounding the opening ceremony highlighted the growing rift between Muslims of South Asian ancestry, who generally frequent the mosque, and the black Muslim population, which boycotted the ceremony due to the perception that the financial backer of the rehabilitation project was using his wealth in exchange for political favors for South Asians.

SECTION IV. U.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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 320,827 square miles, and its population was approximately two million. More than 90 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian. The two largest denominations were the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches, while smaller numbers were affiliated with the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). There were also a number of Zionist Churches (a mixture of traditional African beliefs and Pentecostal Christianity), especially in urban areas. The Afrikaner ethnic group was the predominant patron of the Dutch Reformed Church of Namibia. The Himba, an eth-

nic group that constitutes less than 1 percent of the population, practiced a traditional indigenous religion oriented toward their natural environment in the desert northwest. The San people, who constitute less than 3 percent of the population, also practiced a traditional indigenous religion. Other religions included Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and the Baha'i Faith. Practitioners of these religions predominantly were immigrants, descendents of immigrants, or recent converts. They resided primarily in urban areas. There were few atheists in the country. Muslims, almost exclusively Sunni and comprising both citizens and foreign nationals, represented less than 1 percent of the population.

Foreign missionary groups, including Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, Mormons, and Baha'is, operated 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 denominations—Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic—in mobilizing political support. Since his election, President 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The Council of Churches has as its general secretary a member of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. There are two private religious radio stations and one free-to-air television channel. A widely available satellite television service offers four exclusively religious channels, including one serving the Muslim community. There were two reported cases of villagers in the north beating individuals suspected of witchcraft. Police arrested and charged five individuals, including one police officer, in one case; investigations continued in the second incident.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives had frequent contact with citizens and foreign visitors from a wide variety of religious faiths. The embassy continued to support activities that encourage respect for all aspects of human rights, including religious tolerance, through the Democracy and Human Rights Fund.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 490,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 13.95 million. Islam was the dominant religion and was practiced by more than 90 percent of the population. Approximately 95 percent of the Muslim population was Sunni, while the remaining 5 percent was Shi'a. There were also small communities of Christians and Baha'is. Christians, both Roman Catholics and Protestants, accounted for less than 5 percent of the population but were present particularly in the regions of Maradi, Dogondoutchi, Niamey, and other urban centers with expatriate populations. Christianity was the religion of French colonial institutions, and its followers included many local believers from the educated, the elite, and colonial families, as well as African immigrants from neighboring coastal countries, particularly Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Numbering only a few thousand, the Baha'i were located primarily in Niamey and in communities on the west side of the Niger River, bordering Burkina Faso. A small percentage of the population practiced traditional indigenous religions. There was no information available regarding the number of atheists.

Active Christian missionary organizations included the Southern Baptists, evangelical Baptists, Catholics, Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventists, Service in Mission (SIM), and Jehovah's Witnesses.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice, as long as persons respected public order, social peace, and 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 would typically broadcast it only on Sundays and on special occasions, such as Christmas and Easter.

Religious organizations must register with the Interior Ministry. This registration is a formality, and there is no evidence that the Government favors any religion over another or that it ever has refused to register a religious organization. Approval is based on submission of required legal documents and the vetting of organization leaders. The Government must also authorize construction of any place of worship; however, there were no reports that the Government refused construction permits during the period covered by this report.

Foreign missionaries work freely, but their organizations must be registered officially as associations. In addition to proselytizing, most missionary groups generally offered development or humanitarian assistance. The Christian community in Galmi, Tahoua region, benefited from a hospital and health center run by SIM missionaries. The hospital and health center have been in operation for more than forty years.

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.

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

On February 10, 2006, the Government, in conjunction with the country's Islamic organizations, established the Niger Islamic Council. Composed of ten leaders drawn from various Islamic associations and NGOs and ten representatives of government agencies, the council would advise the Government on issues of concern to Muslims, including preaching, mosque construction, and zakat. The council was also charged with promoting a culture of tolerance and social peace. During the installation of the council, the prime minister noted that the organization was also intended "to address behaviors and practices inspired by foreign countries." This remark was broadly interpreted to mean that the council would promote the practice of the moderate, tolerant Islam that the country has known for centuries, while countering extremist interpretations imported from, or influenced by, other Islamic countries. The minister of the interior also announced that a Christian council would be established in the near future.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There were no further developments in the March 2005 protest incident at an American missionary church compound in the city of Maradi. Of the sixty protestors arrested in this incident, the majority were minors who were released shortly thereafter. Fifteen adult protestors were held in custody for three days before being released as part of a general, nation-wide agreement between the Government and the civil society group that had organized the anti-tax protests. Likewise, there were no further reports of violence or tensions between mainstream Sunni Muslim youth and members of the Wahhabist Izalay sect.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy regularly emphasizes the importance of tolerance in its public statements and in meetings with government officials and members of civil society.

Embassy officers maintained regular contact with Muslim religious leaders, community members, and students. The embassy maintains good relationships with evangelical Christian religious groups, most of which are staffed by long-term resident missionaries and well-known members of the American community. Embassy officials also have contact with the Catholic diocese, the Baha'i community, and Islamic organizations.

NIGERIA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. While the Federal Government generally respected religious freedom, there were some instances in which limits were placed on religious activity to address security and public safety concerns.

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

Interreligious tension between Christians and Muslims remained high in some areas, and there were several violent economic, ethnic, and political conflicts that took on religious overtones. A government census was held in March, the first since 1991. Census results were not scheduled to be released until at least November 2006. The census had been expected to settle the question of whether Christians or Muslims make up the majority in the country. However, the religious issue proved

so divisive that questions related to it were eventually removed from the census form. 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 broached and actively pursued several religious freedom-related issues, and this was an important part of the U.S. embassy's program. The ambassador and the embassy have taken an active role in discussing and advocating these issues with government, religious and community leaders, and are involved in these issues countrywide. The embassy has 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 its population is estimated at 140 to 150 million. There were no accepted figures for the proportion of citizens who practiced Islam or Christianity; it was generally assumed the numbers were roughly equal and that there were a substantial number who practiced traditional indigenous religions alongside Christianity or Islam. The predominant form of Islam in the country was Sunni. The Christian population included 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).

There was a strong correlation between religious differences and ethnic and regional diversity. The north, dominated by the large Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups, was predominantly Muslim with significant numbers of Christians. Both Muslims and Christians were found in large numbers in the Middle Belt. In the southwest, where the large Yoruba ethnic group was the majority, there was no dominant religion. Most Yorubas practiced either Christianity or Islam, while others continued to practice the traditional Yoruba religion, which includes a belief in a supreme deity and the worship of lesser deities that serve as the supreme deity's agents in aspects of daily life. In the east, where the large Igbo ethnic group was dominant, Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists were the majority, although many Igbos continued to observe traditional rites and ceremonies in tandem with Christianity.

The Government conducted a nationwide census in March 2006. There was a great deal of controversy over whether to count religion and ethnicity during the census exercise. The final decision was to leave questions of ethnicity and religion off the census form. Therefore, no precise data was gathered about the relative numbers of adherents to various faiths in the country.

Christian missionaries from many denominations operated freely. Rough estimates put the number of foreign Christian missionaries at more than one thousand, with many residing in the area around Jos in the Middle Belt's Plateau State. Many Christian missionaries have been present for a decade or longer. There were fewer foreign Muslim missionaries, and they generally stayed for shorter periods of time than their Christian counterparts.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change one's religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate one's religion or belief through worship, teaching, practice, and observance. While the Federal Government generally respected religious freedom, there were some instances in which limits were placed on religious activity to address security and public safety concerns.

The Government remained a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference during the period covered by this report. However, there is no state religion.

Each year the Government observes the following Islamic and Christian holy days as national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Christmas, and Boxing Day.

There are thirty-six states; governors have substantial autonomy in all decision making but derive the vast majority of their resources from the Federal Government. The constitution prohibits state and local governments from adopting an official religion; however, some Christians have alleged that Islam has been adopted as a de facto state religion in several northern states, citing the reintroduction of criminal law aspects of Shari'a (Islamic law) and the continued use of state resources to fund the construction of mosques, the teaching of Kadis (Shari'a judges), and pilgrimages to Mecca (Hajj). However, several states, including northern states, used government revenues to fund Christian activities, including pilgrimages to Je-

rusalem. In general, state governments, whether dominated by Christians or Muslims, tended to lean toward the faith practiced by the majority of residents.

The constitution provides that states may elect to use Shari'a laws and courts. There are twelve northern states that have adopted at least parts of Shari'a—Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Borno, Zamfara, and Gombe. Adherence to Shari'a provisions is compulsory for Muslims in some states and optional in others. Non-Muslims are not required in any state to submit to Shari'a jurisdiction. In some states non-Muslims have the option of submitting to Shari'a jurisdiction when the penalty under Shari'a is less severe, such as paying a fine rather than a jail sentence under secular law. Defendants have the right to challenge the constitutionality of Shari'a criminal statutes through the secular courts. As in the previous reporting period, no challenges with adequate legal standing reached the secular appellate system. The constitution also provides for the Federal Government to establish a federal Shari'a court of appeal and a final court of appeal; however, the Government has not yet established such courts.

Christian and Islamic groups planning to build new churches or mosques are required by law to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The CAC did not deny registration to any religious group during the period covered by this report. Many nascent churches and Islamic congregations ignored the registration requirement, and a small number, most notably those in Abuja, had their places of worship shut down or demolished when the zoning laws were enforced.

Both federal and state governments were involved in the regulation of mandatory religious instruction in public schools.

Some state governors actively encouraged interfaith and interethnic discussions and took steps to prevent further violence and tension. The Government encouraged the activities of nongovernmental organizations such as the Kano-based Inter-Ethnic Forum, the Kaduna-based Inter-Faith Mediation Center, and the Muslim/Christian Dialogue Forum. At the national level, the Government established an Inter-Religious Council, consisting of prominent Muslim and Christian leaders.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government requires permits for outdoor public functions; government authorities and those assembling often ignored this requirement. In June 2005 an Abuja High Court ruled that long-standing legal provisions of the Public Order Act banning gatherings whose political, ethnic, or religious content might lead to unrest were unconstitutional. While it is not specific to religious gatherings, the act has nonetheless allowed authorities wide latitude in dispersing gatherings in which they have a "reasonable ground to fear a breach of the peace."

Despite the court ruling, several state governments continued to ban public mass-rally proselytizing to avoid ethno-religious violence. Some proselytizing groups remained active even before the court ruling, but since the ban was ruled unconstitutional in 2005, large outdoor religious gatherings were less likely to be restricted. Some state governments continued to impose bans inconsistent with the court ruling.

In 2003 the National Broadcasting Commission ruled that televangelists who broadcast religious miracles would be required to provide evidence to prove the authenticity of the alleged miracles. The Lagos High Court ordered a suspension of the ruling pending its hearing of a lawsuit contesting the policy. The suit was not heard during the reporting period, and some evangelists continued to reference miracles in their broadcasts.

Although distribution of religious publications was generally unrestricted, the Government sporadically enforced a ban against broadcasting religious advertisements on state-owned radio and television stations.

In Zamfara State, all criminal cases involving Muslims must be heard by a Shari'a court. Other states utilizing Shari'a law permit Muslims to choose secular courts for criminal cases; however, societal pressure compelled most Muslims to use the Shari'a court system. Some kadis (Shari'a judges) apply harsher penalties in adultery and fornication cases against women than in such cases against men and require stronger evidence to convict men than to convict women. While this legal standard still existed, there was less controversy surrounding specific Shari'a cases in the reporting period than during previous periods. No specific cases of adultery or fornication were known to have been prosecuted during the reporting period.

There are no laws barring women or any groups from testifying in secular court or that give less weight to their testimony; however, the testimony of women and non-Muslims usually is accorded less weight in Shari'a courts.

In the north there is a long tradition of separating schoolchildren according to gender. Some form of gender segregation occurred in many secondary schools in the north. In December 2004 the Kano State Commissioner of Education announced

that public and private school pupils should observe "decent standards of dress," although non-Muslim girls would not be required to wear the headscarf.

The Government continued to ban religious organizations from primary school campuses, although individual students retained the right to practice their religions in registered places of worship. The constitution does not require students to receive instruction in a religion other than their own; however, the Ministry of Education requires public school students to undergo either Islamic or Christian religious instruction. State authorities claim that students are permitted not to attend classes taught in a religion other than their own and that students may request a teacher of their own religion to provide alternative instruction. However, there were often no teachers of "Christian Religious Knowledge" in many northern schools, and of "Muslim Religious Knowledge" in some southern schools.

Christians in the predominantly Muslim northern states continued to allege that local government officials used zoning regulations to stop or slow the establishment of new churches. Muslims continued to complain that they were denied permission to build mosques in predominantly Christian southern states. Officials responded that many of these proposed new churches and mosques were being planned for residential neighborhoods not zoned for religious purposes. State officials also stated that the certification boards were dealing with a large backlog of cases for all applicants regardless of religious faith.

Although the expanded Shari'a laws technically do not apply to non-Muslims, the non-Muslim minority has been affected by certain social provisions associated with Shari'a, such as the separation of the sexes in public schools, and health and transportation services. Many social provisions associated with Shari'a have roots in the country's pre-Islamic societies and were in practice before the states adopted Shari'a. For example, schoolchildren were separated by sex in most northern states prior to the recent implementation of Shari'a law.

Although most states have not criminalized alcohol consumption by non-Muslims, in May 2004 Kano State announced that non-Muslims would be fined approximately $380 (50,000 naira) or up to a year in prison for drinking or selling alcohol in certain public places; however there were no reports of non-Muslims being penalized during the reporting period. In some northern states, the sale and public consumption of alcohol have been restricted, except on federal government installations, such as military and police barracks. Additionally, alcohol was available in Kano in spite of the ban, and while restrictions against it were not enforced, it was generally available only in international hotels or within small communities of Christians.

Kano State announced in May 2005 that commercial motorcycle taxis could no longer take women as passengers because, it claimed, the transport of women on motorcycles was contrary to Shari'a. The state government did not cite any specific Qur'anic references in announcing the ban. Both Muslim and non-Muslim women were affected by the ban. Zamfara State continued to enforce gender-segregated public transportation such as minibuses and motorcycle taxis. The bans on mixed gender transportation did not appear to extend to private vehicles.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The constitution permits capital punishment; although several Shari'a courts, as well as secular courts, sentenced persons to death, no Shari'a death sentences were implemented during the period covered by this report.

In September 2004 in Bauchi State, Daso Adamu, a nursing mother, was sentenced to death by stoning when she initially admitted to having sex with her first husband after her second husband absconded. The man was freed for lack of evidence. In October 2004 she was released on bail on the grounds that she was breastfeeding. In December 2004 a Shari'a appeals court vacated the conviction and sentence, ruling that her pregnancy was insufficient evidence to convict her.

In October 2004 in Bauchi State, Hajara Ibrahim was sentenced to death by stoning for adultery after becoming pregnant outside of wedlock. According to the Shari'a court that convicted her, she confessed to having sex with a man who had promised to marry her. The man denied meeting her and was released for lack of evidence. The defendant appealed the sentence, stating that she should have been charged with the lesser crime of fornication, rather than adultery. In November 2005 a Shari'a appeals court overturned the conviction and sentence, ruling that she had never consummated an arranged marriage and therefore should never have been charged with adultery. It appeared that the prosecution in the case had not pursued the fornication charge subsequent to the court's ruling.

The Nigeria Legal Aid Council agreed to appeal thirty Shari'a convictions and death sentences in Bauchi State. In one case from September 2004, an eighteen-year-old man, Saleh Dabo, alleged that police told him he could plead guilty to rape and he would be released; instead, a court sentenced him to death by stoning for

adultery, even though he was not married. At the end of the period covered by this report, the appeal had not been heard, and the sentence had not been carried out.

Muslims convicted of crimes under Shari'a were sentenced to public caning for minor offenses, such as petty theft, public consumption of alcohol, and prostitution. Unlike in the past, there were no reports that states administered amputations or canings pursuant to Shari'a during the period covered by this report. 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. Many of these cases were delayed continuously for various reasons.

In May 2005 a Shari'a appeals court in Kaduna overturned amputation sentences that had been passed in 2003 against six Zaria men who had been accused of stealing a cow and a motorcycle. The appeals court ruled that the lower court had erred in convicting the men solely on the basis of police testimony, without allowing the men to defend themselves. The men also had not had access to legal representation, as required by the Kaduna State Shari'a code.

Human rights groups reported that many indigent persons convicted of Shari'a offenses claimed they had not known they were entitled to legal representation.

A number of states with expanded Shari'a laws have sanctioned private Shari'a enforcement vigilante groups (known as Hisbah). In some cases these groups had authority to make arrests, but generally the groups were empowered only to "advise" possible Shari'a offenders. The Hisbah groups were not very active during the period covered by this report.

There was no further information on the imam detained by the Government in 2003, and who continued to be held despite a 2003 Kaduna state court order for his release.

There were instances of violence by security forces. In October 2004, during Ramadan, police killed two persons and injured three or four others in Gusau, the capital of mostly Muslim Zamfara State in the northwest. A crowd had approached the state government's building to demand traditional Ramadan alms from the Zamfara State governor. Police at the gates stopped the crowd from advancing, a scuffle ensued, and police opened fire. No further investigation was expected in the incident.

The Adamawa state governor dethroned the ethnic Bachama traditional ruler for his role in inciting violence between ethnic Bachama Christians and ethnic Hausa Muslims in Numan in June 2004. Later the governor named a new traditional leader for the Bachama. In early February 2005 police killed at least two persons and arrested at least thirty others who were protesting the appointment of the new ruler, claiming that he had no mandate to rule over them. It was believed that those arrested were later released.

There were no other 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

Interreligious tension between Christians and Muslims remained high in some areas, and there were several violent economic, ethnic, and political conflicts that took on religious overtones.

Religious differences often mirror regional and ethnic differences. For example, persons in the North and in parts of the Middle Belt are overwhelmingly Muslim and from the large Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups that tend to dominate these areas. Many southern ethnic groups are predominantly Christian. In many areas of the Middle Belt, Muslim Fulani tend to be pastoralists, while the Muslim Hausa and most Christian ethnic groups tend to be farmers or work in urban areas. Consequently ethnic, regional, economic, and land use competition often correlate with religious differences between the competing groups.

It is not unusual for different ethnic groups with a long history of conflict to have adopted different religions with the effect of exacerbating existing tensions. Communal conflicts in Plateau and Kano States in 2004 led to the deaths of thousands and a several-month-long states of emergency in Plateau State. There have been incidents of violence in Plateau State since, but not on the scale of the previous reporting period. For example, in April 2006 at least twenty-five persons were killed and hundreds fled their homes during fighting between the Pan and Gomai people of Plateau state over land ownership.

There were also instances of violence primarily based on religious issues or because of their religious affiliations.

As many as 50,000 persons were displaced and approximately 150 killed in a wave of sectarian violence across various states at the end of February, sparked by protests over caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, according to the Nigerian Red Cross. The majority of deaths occurred in the mainly Christian southeast city of Onitsha, where groups of armed youths attacked Muslim Hausa-speakers from the north in revenge for Christian Igbos killed some days earlier in the north of the country. Spiraling violence spread across at least six states, with thousands of persons taking refuge mainly in police and army barracks or churches, although many later returned to their homes. Widespread destruction of property took place, with numerous churches, mosques, and houses burned down. State governments in the affected areas dispatched police and army reinforcements and imposed curfews in an attempt to contain the situation. The curfews were later lifted.

In September 2005 a student quarrel occurred at the University of Minna over respect for the generally observed Shari'a dress code in which two female non-Muslim students and several males were reportedly injured. Details of how the conflict started were not available.

In February 2005 in Sokoto aState, at least three persons were killed and dozens injured in fighting between groups of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims during a public commemoration of Ashura. To restore order, a curfew was imposed for approximately one month.

Also in February students at a secondary school in Bauchi Sate reportedly threatened a Christian teacher for handling the Qur'an, and in a subsequent demonstration that turned violent, two churches were burned and approximately twenty Christians were killed. The teacher came in contact with a copy of the Qur'an while taking it from a student who was reading it while class was in session. While approximately twenty-five arrests were believed to have been made, the case was being handled as a state security matter with little information publicly available. Some of the defendants may have been taken to Jos and were believed to have been granted bail, and some of the defendants were believed to have been taken to Abuja. Christian religious leaders in Bauchi were unable to make contact with the teacher, Florence Chuckwu.

A Christian female student from a nursing school in Sokoto was threatened after she was accused of having made inappropriate remarks about Islam. The school was closed for a few weeks for security reasons. A police investigation did not locate the perpetrators. The case arose when the student's Christian mother converted to Islam and married a Muslim man. The student refused to convert, and her fellow students asked her why she had not done so while using inflammatory language denigrating Jesus Christ. The student responded with inflammatory language denigrating the Prophet Muhammad, and a riot ensued. She was spirited away from the scene by a Muslim instructor who, according to credible reports, later faced reprisals for helping. The student was given refuge at the local police station. Shortly before a crowd threatened the station, she was moved to a different town and then to another state for her safety. She reportedly planned to attend school elsewhere.

In December 2004 at a major university in Bauchi state, a group of Muslim students abducted and killed the head of a Christian campus organization in retaliation for what they considered to be insults to Islam by Christian students. To alleviate tensions and escalating violence against property, authorities closed the university and another nearby school, but both later reopened after an interfaith dialogue had been established. No arrests or prosecutions in the case were reported.

No further action was taken, nor was further action likely, in connection with the church and mosque burnings in Kebbi, Kaduna, Ebonyi, and Jigawa States in 2004. No one remained in detention from these incidents, nor was further action likely in relation to the 2003 unrest in Jigawa and Plateau States.

The law prohibits religious discrimination in employment and other practices; however, private businesses frequently discriminated on the basis of religion or ethnicity in their hiring practices and purchasing patterns. In nearly all states, ethnic rivalries between "indigene" groups and "settlers" led to some societal discrimination against minority ethnic and religious groups.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses were generally respected; however there were isolated instances of societal abuse and discrimination when a Witnesses chose not to join local age-grade associations or women's associations for religious reasons.

On September 6, 2005, in Imo state, a female Witness was assaulted by a mob of women who pulled off her dress for refusing to be a member of their association. Several other Witnesses were assaulted in other incidents and had property looted for not paying a women's association levy. Although in some instances police were able to broker an agreement, no arrests were made.

In Abia state, Witnesses who chose not to participate in local age-grade associations for religious reasons were in some instances ostracized by the community, denied the right to sell goods in the public market, and denied water from the public tap.

According to several eyewitnesses, on November 11, 2005, members of the Eleghawa Age-Grade Association of Asafa Ohafia looted the home of a Jehovah's Witnesses husband and wife, taking all their belongings. Although the perpetrators were identified, police made no arrests.

On June 21, 2005, villagers in Isiugwu Ohafia Community in Abia state reportedly destroyed the Kingdom Hall, and attacked the homes of twenty-four Jehovah's Witnesses families. More than seventy persons remain displaced from their homes. Despite formal petitions by the families for an investigation and the prosecution of the perpetrators, police made no arrests.

Although many non-Muslims feared that implementation of Shari'a would change their way of life, there has been little or no change in the daily lives of most non-Muslims. While some state and local governments interpreted the new Shari'a laws stringently, the majority of states and local governments interpreted and implemented their laws less stringently. There also was a trend developing among some segments of the Muslim community to shift focus away from the criminal law aspects of Shari'a law to its tenets of social justice and charity for the poor. Islamic scholars and many Muslim lawyers have begun educating the poor and the less well informed about their procedural rights under Shari'a. Several lawyers offered free services to the indigent in cases with potentially severe punishments.

In many areas, girls are discriminated against in their access to education for social and economic reasons; religious beliefs sometimes are a factor. Girls living in the more traditional rural areas, both in the predominantly Muslim north and the predominantly Christian south, are disadvantaged more than their urban counterparts.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. mission regularly raised religious freedom issues with various federal, state, and local officials, and with prominent citizens. The U.S. government, through the U.S. mission and in statements from officials in Washington, sought to encourage a peaceful resolution of the debate concerning Shari'a criminal penalties in a way that would be compatible with recognized international human rights norms and urged that human rights and religious freedom be respected in all instances.

The U.S. mission made an especially strong effort to promote religious reconciliation between Christians and Muslims. Mission officers traveled extensively to the individual states to meet with Christian and Muslim leaders throughout the year and further that outreach.

The U.S. mission reached out to Muslim communities in several programs, including the International Visitor Program, the American Speaker Program, the Fulbright Senior Scholar Program, and the Humphrey Fellowship Program. The U.S. mission also continued publishing its informational magazine in Hausa, the language of the predominantly Muslim north.

RWANDA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There were a small number of cases of local government officials reacting to belief-based actions of Jehovah's Witnesses.

There was an improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and 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, and there were some cases of detention and expulsion of children from school. Relations between the Government and the Roman Catholic Church continued to improve, and Muslims continued to enjoy greater freedom of worship than under the previous government.

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

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. 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 8.3 million. A 2001 study conducted by a foreign university reported that 49.6 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, 43.9 percent Protestant, 4.6 percent Muslim, 1.7 claimed no religious affiliation, and 0.1 percent practiced traditional indigenous beliefs. This study indicated a 19.9 percent increase in the number of Protestants, a 7.6 percent drop in the number of Catholics, and a 3.5 percent increase in the number of Muslims from the 1996 U.N. Population Fund survey. The figures for Protestants include the growing number of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical Protestant groups. There also was 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 faiths operated in the country, including Trocaire, Catholic Relief Services, Lutheran World Federation, World Vision, World Relief, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Norwegian Church Aid, Salvation Army, Direct Aid (formerly the African Muslim Agency), Jesuit Relief Society, Christian Aid, Christian Direct Outreach, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, African Evangelical Enterprise, and Jesus Alive Ministries. Foreign missionaries openly promoted their religious beliefs, and the Government has welcomed their development assistance. There was no indication that religious belief is linked directly to membership in any political party.

An Australian Christian church-based initiative called Hope Rwanda involved approximately 500 volunteers visiting the country in the spring and summer of 2006. The initiative, planned to coincide with the one-hundred-day national period of mourning genocide victims, included humanitarian assistance and religious services and training. Hope Rwanda received strong support from the Government, including a speech by President Kagame during the opening ceremony.

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 were fewer reports of local authorities restricting religious freedom. The constitution prohibits the formation of political organizations that are 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 does include a provision for a ceremonial oath of office for high-level government officials that makes reference to God.

The penal code, Articles 293 to 296, provides for small fines and imprisonment of up to six 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 for those who violate these regulations.

In 2001 the Government promulgated a law giving it more influence over NGOs as well as religious institutions and organizations. Subsequently, after consulting with civil society and NGOs, the Government decided to draft separate laws governing local NGOs, international NGOs, and religious organizations. These laws were being developed in collaboration with church officials but have not been promulgated. The existing 2001 law requires NGOs to present their objectives and plan of action to local authorities for "provisional agreement" and then to apply to the Ministry of Justice for legal recognition. Since the law was implemented, the Ministry of Justice has registered 116 new religious groups; no new religious groups were registered during the period covered by this report. The ministry did not deny any new applications; however, the Government continued the 2003 suspension of two local splinter organizations, the "Eglise Methodiste Unie au Rwanda" (the United Methodist Church of Rwanda) led by Jupa Kaberuka and the "Communauté Methodiste Union Internationale" (the International Union Methodist Community) led by Louis Bwanakweli. Both 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 was before the High Court at the end of the reporting period. However, in general no group's religious activities were curtailed as a result of difficulties or delays in the registration process.

There were reports that numerous religious organizations operated without legal recognition because the process was arduous, which government officials confirmed.

Members of unregistered groups were vulnerable to censorship and possible detention.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In some cases, students were given a choice between instruction in "religion" or "morals." In the past, missionaries established schools that were operated by the Government. In those schools, religious instruction tended to reflect the denomination of the founders, either Catholic or Protestant. Muslim private schools operated as well.

The Government observes six holy days as official holidays: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Eid-al-Fitr, All Saints' Day, and Assumption. The Government's recognition of these holy days does not negatively affect any religious groups.

Relations between the Government and the Catholic Church continued to improve because of collaboration and dialogue in the areas of education and reconciliation. In addition, Muslims continued to enjoy greater freedom of worship than under the previous government. Sheikh Abdoul Karim Harerimana, a key Muslim figure, publicly stated at a ceremony at the National University of Rwanda on May 10, 2005, that Muslims enjoy freedom of worship without oppression, unlike during previous regimes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government requires religious groups to provide advance notification of religious meetings held at night. 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. Some small religious groups that met in private homes were forced to move to new locations.

In 2004 the Government suspended the registration of two Pentecostal churches led by American pastors, presumably for alleged irregularities in a pastor's visa application as well as an ongoing dispute over the naming of his church. Further action on the case was pending promulgation of a new law on religious organizations.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses' Office of General Counsel in New York, two Jehovah's Witnesses were detained, released, and forced to pay a fine for not participating in the national anthem. The Office of General Counsel also reported that between February and May 2006, forty-eight members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned in the Kibungo province for not participating in the armed night patrols. As of June 9, 2006, six remained in prison.

All but eleven of the ninety-three Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned or detained in 2005 for failure to participate in night patrols were released without charges in the same year. The eleven whose cases went to court were sentenced from three to six months in prison. Another member of the Jehovah's Witnesses who did not participate in the armed night patrols was accused of rebellion and sentenced in August 2005 to six months in prison. He was released from prison on January 14, 2006.

During the reporting period, following the citing of religious figures and groups in the 2004 parliamentary report on genocide ideology, there were a few reports that religious groups had changed their location or tailored their activities to avoid confrontation with authorities.

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 church members to marry, since they had to find officials willing to perform the ceremony without the flag requirement. In 2006 two couples in Bugarsera District were denied marriage certificates due to their refusal to take the marriage oath while touching the national flag.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Local leadership of the Jehovah's Witnesses leadership reported a significantly better relationship between their church and the Government. During the period covered by this report, Jehovah's Witnesses officials successfully engaged the Government at the national and local levels on both specific cases and general issues of contention. They reported receiving greatly improved support from the national government and the majority of local government officials.

On January 1, 2006, the Government consolidated the country's territorial administrative structure into 4 provinces, 30 districts, and 416 sectors. The subsequent change in leadership at the district and sector levels required the church leadership to address with new officials issues which were previously resolved with the outgoing leaders. While decisions regarding the church at the ministerial level have been positive, church leadership reported a lack of communication between the national government and some local leaders.

However, there were problems with some local leaders at the sector and district level, including the continued policy of not allowing new Kingdom Halls to be built in Kigali and Muhanaga Districts, the expulsion of six primary students in Nyange District for refusing to attend Christian services in their school, and the detention of forty-eight members in five districts for refusing to participate in community night patrols. In 2006 forty-seven were held for periods of one to six days and released. Two members, who were detained in Huye district, were reportedly beaten by prison guards and released without a trial on May 9, 2006. One member was still in detention at the end of the reporting period. Another member, detained on May 23, 2006, in Kibungo District, was severely beaten by the Executive Secretary of Kirehe-Kigarame Sector and released on May 30, 2006.

In several other districts, local officials agreed to alternative services rather than night patrols for members of Jehovah's Witnesses, such as community-building projects. Local officials were not always aware of alternative services available; however, representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses and government officials often mediated to resolve this issue successfully.

In May 2005 two Jehovah's Witnesses in Ngoma District, Eastern Province, were charged with disrespect of public order for refusing to sing the national anthem during a public meeting. A sentence of two months imprisonment was recommended. The verdict was announced by the end of the reporting period and the sentence had not been carried out. A family of Jehovah's Witnesses was arrested and jailed in September for refusing to sing the national anthem during a gacaca proceeding. The mother and child were released after two days, the father after four days.

Pastors Stanislas Ntawurikura and Denis Serugendo, who were arrested in March 2005 in Kibungo Province on charges of "rebellion," were tried, found not guilty, and released in June 2005 along with the other sixteen prisoners.

The eight members of a dissident Catholic congregation ("Mouvement Marial") in Gisenyi Province accused of "subversive activities" and arrested in February 2004 were released without trial on April 13, 2006.

Pentecostal Church leaders detained in February 2003 for meeting at night and conducting a religious service outside their church were released in August 2005 without formal charge.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There were numerous associations and interfaith groups, such as the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Protestant Council of Rwanda, that contribute to understanding and tolerance among the various religions.

The Interfaith Commission for Rwanda (launched by Muslims, Protestant and Evangelical churches in 2003) promotes unity and reconciliation by supporting activities such as aid programs aimed at reconciling genocide survivors, released genocide prisoners, and genocide detainees' families. Under the leadership the Anglican Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini and Mufti Saleh Habimana, the leader of the country's Muslim community, the Interfaith Commission hosted the Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa (IAPA), an international event attended by a broad cross-section of the religious community, including representatives of Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and traditional African 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. Embassy officers maintain regular contact with leaders and members of religious communities.

Embassy officers held numerous meetings with members of the Catholic and Anglican Churches, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, leaders of the Muslim community, and small, evangelical Protestant groups to promote interfaith dialogue and discuss religious freedom. In addition, embassy officers regularly met with local and international NGOs involved in peace, justice, and reconciliation efforts that focus on religious tolerance and freedom. As part of its ongoing dialogue with the Government, the U.S. government addressed and followed individual cases of concern.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 386 square miles, and its population is approximately 160,400 (2004 estimate). The population was predominantly Roman Catholic. No official statistics were available; however, it was estimated that approximately 80 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, 15 percent was Protestant, 3 percent was Muslim, and 2 percent was atheist. Protestantism has grown considerably in recent years due to the success of Protestant missionaries in the country. The number of Muslims has increased due to an influx of illegal immigrants from Nigeria and Cameroon, but no statistics were available. Traditional indigenous religions did not exist. Although witchcraft was practiced, it was not considered to be a religion. Practitioners of witchcraft most often were members of a major religion.

There were Catholic and Protestant missionaries in the country. Missionaries of other religions also operated 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.

Religious organizations are required to register with the Government; however, there were no reports that any groups were denied registration or that the activities of unregistered groups were restricted.

There are no restrictions on the activities of foreign clergy, and missionaries in the country operated unhindered.

The Government celebrates some holy days as national holidays. These include Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. embassy, based in Libreville, Gabon, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall policy to promote human rights. In addition, embassy officials regularly meet with the country's Catholic bishop, Protestant church leaders, and nongovernmental organizations. Following the 2003 coup attempt, the U.S. government also encouraged a formal process of national reconciliation that included leaders of various religious organizations. The final result of the process was the "National Forum" held in July 2004 that included the participation of most secular and religious leaders in Sao Tome and was chaired by an ordained Protestant minister.

SENEGAL

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 76,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at ten million. According to current government demographic data, Islam was the predominant religion, practiced by approximately 94 percent of the country's population. Most citizens practiced a syncretic form of Islam, combining formal religious practices with traditional cultural beliefs and values. There also was an active Christian community (4 percent of the population) that included Roman Catholics, Protestant denominations, and syncretic Christian-animist groups. The remainder of the population, an estimated 2 percent, practiced exclusively traditional indigenous religions or no religion.

The country was ethnically and religiously diverse. Although there was significant integration of all groups, there were geographic concentrations of some religious groups. The Christian minority was concentrated in the western and southern regions, while groups that practiced traditional religions were mainly in the eastern and southern regions. Immigrants practiced the same faiths as native-born citizens.

A wide variety of foreign missionary groups operated in the country, including Catholics, Protestants, independent missionaries, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

The importance of religion in the country often resulted in the Government giving direct financial and material assistance to religious organizations. There is no official system of distribution for these grants, which are often provided to assist religious groups to maintain or rehabilitate their places of worship or undertake special events. All religions have access to these funds, although there is often competition among religious groups to gain them. During the period covered by this report, the Government provided funds and technical assistance to rehabilitate churches throughout the country, including Dakar's national cathedral, for which the Government donated $1.2 million (CFA 600 million) in 2005. The Government provided security personnel and enhanced public services to support national religious pilgrimages, both Christian and Muslim.

The Government observes a number of Muslim and Christian holy days. Islamic holy days observed are Tabaski, Tamkharit, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Korite. Christian holy days observed are Easter Monday, Ascension, Pentecost, Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Religious organizations are independent of the Government and administer their affairs without government interference; however, the civil and commercial code requires any group, religious or otherwise, to register with the minister of the interior to acquire legal status as an association. Registration enabled an association to conduct business, own property, establish a bank account, and receive financial contributions from private sources. Registered religious groups, including all registered nonprofit organizations, are exempt from many forms of taxation. Registration generally is granted and the minister of interior must have a legal basis for refusing registration.

Missionaries, like other long-term visitors, must obtain residence visas from the Ministry of Interior. Christian and Islamic groups often established a presence as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Religious NGOs obtained 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.

In 2002 the Government passed a law that allows public schools to offer two hours of religious education, both Islamic and Christian, per school week through a pilot program. Religious teaching is an optional part of the curriculum, and students are not required to participate. This program continues to prosper. In less than three years, sixty-six schools and 10,500 students, who follow studies in French, Arabic and Islamic religious studies, have joined the program, which is designed to attract children to public rather than Qur'anic schools that often teach only the Qur'an and Arabic. Privately owned schools are free to provide religious education. The Ministry of Education provides funds to schools operated by religious institutions that meet national education standards. Christian schools, which have a long and successful experience in education, receive the largest share of this government funding. The majority of students attending Christian schools are Muslims. Religious charities also received government support.

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. After Pope John Paul II's death, the Government sent a delegation to attend his funeral that included senior government officials and leaders in the Christian community.

While there is no specific government-sponsored institution to promote interfaith dialogue, the Government generally seeks to promote religious harmony by maintaining relations with the larger religious groups. Senior government officials regularly consulted with religious leaders, and the Government generally was represented at all major religious festivals or events. In April 2005 the Government held a summit to prepare for the Islamic-Christian Dialogue. President Wade, Prime Minister Macky Sall, and other government leaders attended the preparatory meeting, along with delegations from several foreign countries, including the United States. President Wade spoke about the peaceful coexistence of religions in the country, a source of national pride.

The Government actively promoted religious tolerance among its citizens.

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

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

Religion played an important role in the lives of most citizens, and society generally was very open to and tolerant of different religious faiths. The country had a long tradition of amicable and tolerant coexistence between the Muslim majority and Christian, traditional indigenous, and other religious minorities. Interfaith marriage was relatively common. Within certain families, other religious faiths, 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.

Islamic communities generally were organized around one of several brotherhoods, headed by a Khalif, who was a direct descendant of the group's founder. The two largest and most prominent of these brotherhoods were the Tidjanes, based in the city of Tivaouane, and the Mourides, based in the city of Touba. At times there were disputes within the different brotherhoods over questions of succession or general authority; however, relations generally were peaceful and cooperative. In recent

years, a National Committee to Coordinate Sightings of the Moon, and hence the designation of Islamic holy days, was formed at the suggestion of the Government and attempted to increase cooperation among the Islamic subgroups.

While the brotherhoods were not involved directly in politics or government affairs, these groups exert considerable influence in society and maintain a dialogue with political leaders. Close association with a brotherhood, as with any influential community leader, religious or secular, could afford certain political and economic protections and advantages that were not conferred by law.

Christian and Islamic leaders have long maintained a public dialogue with one another. During the period covered by this report, Protestant groups became more active throughout Senegal, a sign, according to one prominent local NGO, of the religious tolerance practiced in the country.

When anonymous death threats were made against members of the Catholic clergy in early 2004, the Government quickly denounced the threats and assured the protection of Christian leaders. Although an investigation did not identify the perpetrators, there were no further threats against the clergy.

Unlike in the past, there were no cases of interfaith violence during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and maintains relations with all major religious groups, including the Mouride, Tidiane, Layanne, and Qadriyya Islamic brotherhoods and Christian groups. During the period covered by this report, the U.S. ambassador and other embassy staff met with religious leaders or their representatives to discuss social and political issues and demonstrate American interest in forging positive relationships with Muslim communities. Embassy staff spent Ramadan engaged in outreach to the major Islamic brotherhoods. The embassy also invited religious leaders to attend its July Fourth celebration and other events. 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 ambassador or his 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 has translated, published, and distributed the "Muslim Life in America" brochure in the two major national languages (Wolof and Pulaar). The embassy routinely released to the local press, posted on its website and published through a monthly magazine, information on Islam in the United States, including statements from the president and the secretary of state celebrating Ramadan and other Islamic holidays. The embassy trained Islamic English teachers and donated Arabic language books to Islamic institutes, schools, and libraries, as well as English-language books on language learning and American Studies.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 444 square miles, and its population is approximately 82,500. According to a 2006 government estimate, about 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic and 7 percent is Anglican. There are other Christian churches, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, the Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assembly, the Nazarites, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Hinduism, Islam, and the Baha'i Faith also are practiced.

A few foreign missionary groups practice in the country, including the Missionaries of Charity, a Roman Catholic religious society.

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. At all levels, the Government 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 Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Seventh-day Adventist churches, Islamic mosques, and Baha'i local spiritual assembly have individual acts of incorporation. Other churches that are not corporate bodies are registered as associations with the Registrar General and are entitled to tax-free privileges, similar to a charity. All religious organizations must register to be entitled to tax-free privileges. If an organization does not want tax-free privileges, it is not required to register.

The Government tends to remain uninvolved with religious matters, but it provides program time to different religious organizations on the national radio broadcasting service. On 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 Islam and Hindu faiths are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Friday afternoon, and the Baha'i and Seventh-day Adventist faiths are allowed 15-minute broadcasts every Saturday afternoon.

Government employees of all faiths can request paid leave on any of their holy days, and such leave generally 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 Roman Catholic holy days of Good Friday, Easter, Corpus Christi, Assumption of Mary, All Saints' Day, Immaculate Conception Day, and Christmas are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In the past, the Government did not demonstrate favoritism toward one religion over another; however, in 2004, the Baie Sainte Anne Church, a Catholic church, was awarded $200,000 (1 million Seychelles rupees) for major renovation works.

According to the Government, a portion of the national budget is periodically allocated to provide assistance to faiths that request financial support at the beginning of each year. In the past, Baha'i and Hindu groups have benefited from these grants, which are awarded on a case-by-case basis and based on the availability of budgeted funds.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were two known incidents of religious intolerance during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 29,925 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.9 million. The Inter-Religious Council (IRC) estimated that the population was 60 to 70 percent Muslim, 20 to 30 percent Christian, and 5 to 10 percent indigenous and other faiths. There were small numbers of Baha'is, Hindus, and Jews. There was no information concerning the number of atheists in the country.

Many syncretistic practices reportedly existed, and many citizens practiced a mixture of Islam and traditional indigenous religions or Christianity and traditional indigenous religions.

Historically, most Muslims have been concentrated in the northern areas of the country, and Christians have been located in the south; however, the eleven-year civil war, which officially was declared over in 2002, resulted in movement by major segments of the population.

There were a number of foreign missionary groups operating in the country, including Roman Catholic, Ahmadiyya, Wesleyan, Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodox Christian, and others.

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 Muslim 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 public schools. Students are allowed to choose whether to attend Muslim- or Christian-oriented classes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In January 2005 the Immigration Department revised its annual registration fees for businessmen, teachers, missionaries, and other groups of foreign residents. Fees for missionaries increased from approximately $3 (10,000 leones) to approximately $70 (200,000 leones). Some foreign missionaries complained that the increased immigration registration fee was a restriction.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of U.S. minor citizens who had 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 February 2006 a self-proclaimed rabbi reported that a Muslim man threatened him while he was proselytizing near a mosque in Freetown. The rabbi said that he departed the area and did not report the incident to the police.

Persons commonly use homes and schools as places of worship. Landlords often permit such activity even if they do not share the same religious beliefs as their tenants. In December 2005 a rabbi reported that he was evicted from his residence in Makeni because he was hosting religious services in his home for approximately 150 persons.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, and interfaith marriage is common. The IRC, composed of Christian and Muslim leaders, plays a vital role in civil society and actively participates in

efforts to further the peace process in the country and the subregion. Christian and Muslim leaders worked together with the National Accountability Group and the Anti-Corruption Commission to address the problem of corruption in society. The IRC reported that membership applications from Baha'i and Jewish representatives were pending.

In April 2005 on a Muslim public holiday, a group of Muslims in Rokupr burned the igbala (hut or shrine) where the local hunting society stored its traditional hunting masks so that the group could not stage its traditional parade. A local newspaper reported and police confirmed that the Muslims burned the masks because they believed that the pagan tradition was a desecration of Muhammad's birthday. Police arrested several persons, but the local chief brought the two groups together and resolved the case out of court.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy continued to maintain frequent contact with the IRC and its individual members.

SOMALIA

There is no constitution and no legal provision for the protection of religious freedom; there were limits on religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), which grew out of individual courts' efforts to establish a degree of order in Mogadishu, took control of the Somali capital on June 4, 2006, following a military confrontation with a loose coalition of Somali warlords. The UIC is heterogeneous and serves as an umbrella coordination mechanism between individual Shari'a courts, with individual courts reflecting a moderate interpretation of Islam and others espousing an extremist form of Islam that has proven intolerant to traditional Somali societal and cultural practices. The UIC was subsequently renamed the Supreme of Islamic Courts Council (SICC) on June 24.

There is strong societal pressure to respect Islamic traditions, especially in enclaves still influenced, and in some instances controlled by, radical Islamists in the Lower Juba region.

The U.S. government does not maintain an official presence in the country. The lack of diplomatic representation has limited the ability of the U.S. government to take action to promote religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 246,200 square miles, and its population was approximately 8.3 million; however, population figures were difficult to estimate due to the instability of the country. Citizens were overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims of a Sufi tradition. There also was a small, extremely low-profile Christian community, in addition to small numbers of followers of other religions. The number of adherents to strains of conservative Islam and the number of Islamic schools funded by religiously conservative sources continued to grow.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

There is no constitution and no legal provision for the protection of religious freedom. There were limits on religious freedom imposed by self-appointed officials and authorities and through societal attitude.

Somalia's nascent central government was able to exercise control over very limited territory. A Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was created in October 2004 following the Somalia National Reconciliation Conference in Mbagathi, Kenya. That government formally established temporary operations in Baidoa in February 2006. The TFG adopted a Transitional Federal Charter in 2004 but was able to begin implementation only in 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. Following the June takeover of Mogadishu by the UIC, the TFG met with representatives of the courts to discuss the current situation in the country. This meeting resulted in an agreement that included provisions to cease antagonistic propaganda and hostilities and to continue discussions on security, politics, and impediments to peace.

The TFG charter establishes Islam as the national religion. Several sheikhs have announced that the TFG must reflect a commitment to Islamic governance and morals. Some local administrations, including the self-declared "Republic of Somaliland" and the semi-autonomous region of Puntland, have made Islam the official religion in their regions; however, regional authorities generally do not espouse rhetoric against non-Muslims. Puntland security forces monitored religious activities very closely.

The judiciary in most regions relies on some combination of Shari'a, traditional and customary law (Xeer), and the penal code of the pre-1991 Siad Barre government. Shari'a courts throughout Mogadishu were asserting their authority, attracting support from businessmen, and sometimes, at least superficially, working across clan lines that traditionally form the primary basis for identity and loyalty.

In Somaliland, religious schools and places of worship are required to obtain the Ministry of Religion's permission to operate. The ministry must approve entry visas for religious groups, and certain unspecified doctrines are prohibited. Religious schools and places of worship in Puntland must receive permission to operate from the Ministry of Justice and Religious Affairs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Proselytizing for any religion except Islam is prohibited in Puntland and Somaliland and effectively blocked by informal social consensus elsewhere in the country. Christian-based international relief organizations generally operated without interference, provided that they refrain from proselytizing.

In April 2004 thousands of citizens marched through the streets in Mogadishu and in the southern coastal town of Merca to protest what they believed was an attempt by aid agencies to spread Christianity. Muslim scholars organized the protest following reports that schoolchildren received gifts with Christian emblems alongside charitable aid. The protesters set ablaze hundreds of cartons containing goods, some marked only as gifts from the "Swiss Church." The protesters warned the aid agencies against using relief items to evangelize.

In March 2004 Mohamed Omar Habeb, also known as Mohamed Dheere, who controlled the Middle Shabbelle region, countered the general Islamic trend in the country by banning women from wearing veils. He subsequently jailed at least seventeen women who had violated his decree, claming that veils made it difficult to distinguish women from men who might be concealing weapons. Habeb was quoted as saying that he was committed to curbing violent attacks by extremists, but he later released the women following an outcry from many Islamic scholars throughout the country, particularly in Mogadishu.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Article 6.3 of the Puntland Charter prohibits torture "unless sentenced by Islamic Shari'a Courts in accordance with Islamic Shari'a law." Islamic courts continued to operate throughout the country in the absence of a national judicial system operated by a central government. In May 2006 a sixteen-year-old boy stabbed to death his father's killer in a public execution ordered by an Islamic court. In June a court sentenced five suspected rapists to death by stoning.

In January 2005 a group of violent extremists desecrated the Italian colonial cemetery in Mogadishu. While the excavation of the cemetery served a political and economic function, the act had religious overtones, as those in control of the site stated that they planned to build a mosque there and erected a makeshift sheet-metal shelter as a first step. The group, although espousing Islamist rhetoric, was widely condemned by mainstream Sufi Muslims and some Salafist groups.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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 there were several fatal attacks against non-Muslim international relief and charity workers throughout the country and in the region of Somaliland. In addition, recent threats have targeted non-Muslim Westerners in the country, including in Somaliland.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Non-Sunni Muslims often were viewed with suspicion by members of the Sunni majority.

The BBC reported that in March 2005, local Muslim cleric Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, an influential figure in the UIC and former leader of Al-Ittihad al-Islami

(AIAI), called for a violent jihad against any peacekeeping force that anticipated accompanying the TFG's return to the country that year.

The activities of the Islamic courts appeared to be largely welcomed by Mogadishu because the courts have brought a degree of order to what was long a lawless city. Some, however, have objected to strict interpretations of Islamic law that forbid the viewing of movies or soccer matches. In one instance, a Shari'a court reportedly ordered that one group of youths have their heads shaved and be whipped for protesting a ban on public broadcasts of World Cup soccer matches.

There is strong societal pressure to respect Islamic traditions, especially in enclaves still influenced but not controlled by Islamists espousing violent political agendas in Doble, Ras Kaambooni, and Kolbiyow in the Lower Juba region. Organized Islamic groups whose goal is the establishment of an Islamic state include Al-Islah, a generally nonviolent political movement that operates primarily in Mogadishu, and AIAI, a militant Islamic organization. AIAI committed terrorist acts in Somalia and Ethiopia in the mid-1990s and remains on the U.S. government's Terrorist Exclusion List. Although individuals continued to claim to be adherents to its precepts, AIAI remained heavily factionalized and its membership decentralized. Unlike AIAI, Al-Islah is a generally nonviolent and modernizing Islamic movement that emphasizes the reformation and revival of Islam to meet the challenges of the modern world.

There are a significant number of externally funded Qur'anic schools throughout the country. These schools provide inexpensive basic education but may require young girls to wear veils and participate in other conservative Islamic practices not generally found in the local culture. Mogadishu University, the University of East Africa in Bosasso, Puntland, and many secondary schools in Mogadishu are externally funded and administered through organizations affiliated with the conservative Islamic organization Al-Islah.

Christians, as well as other non-Muslims who proclaim their religion, faced occasional societal harassment.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government does not maintain a diplomatic presence, and travel to the country by U.S. government officials is seriously proscribed. The central government remains too weak to adequately engage on issues of religious freedom; regional and self-proclaimed authorities are unresponsive due to the lack of U.S. diplomatic recognition of or representation to them. These restraints have limited the U.S. government's ability to take action to promote religious freedom in the country.

SOUTH AFRICA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 470,693 square miles, and its population was approximately 46.9 million. According to figures on religious demography from the 2001 census, approximately 80 percent of the population belonged to the Christian faith, and 4 percent to other religions, including Hinduism (1.2 percent), Islam (1.5 percent), Judaism (0.2 percent), and traditional African beliefs (0.3 percent). Approximately 15 percent of the population indicated that it belonged to no particular religion or declined to indicate an affiliation.

The African Independent Churches were the largest group of Christian churches. There were more than 4,000 of these churches, with a total membership of more than ten million. Although these churches originally were founded as breakaways from various mission churches (the so-called Ethiopian churches), the African Independent Churches consisted mostly of Zionist or Apostolic churches and also included some Pentecostal branches. The Zionist Christian Church was the largest Af-

rican Independent Church with 11.1 percent of the population. The African Independent Churches attracted persons in rural and urban areas.

Other Christian churches included the Dutch Reformed family of churches, which consisted of approximately 6.7 percent of the population, and the Roman Catholic Church, which consisted of approximately 7.1 percent. Protestant denominations include the Methodist (6.8 percent), Anglican (3.8 percent), Lutheran (2.5 percent), Presbyterian (1.9 percent), Baptist (1.5 percent), and Congregational (1.1 percent) churches. The largest traditional Pentecostal churches were the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God, and the Full Gospel Church. A number of charismatic churches have been established in recent years. Their subsidiary churches, together with those of the Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria, were grouped in the International Fellowship of Christian Churches. The Greek Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist churches also were active.

Approximately 15 percent of the population claimed no affiliation with any formal religious organization. It was believed that many of these persons adhered to traditional indigenous religions. Followers of traditional indigenous religions believed that certain practitioners may manipulate the power of the spirits using herbs, therapeutic techniques, or supernatural powers. Some practitioners were considered witches and engender fear. Many persons combined Christian and traditional indigenous religious practices.

According to the latest available statistics from the 2001 census, an estimated 80 percent of Black Africans, who constitute the majority of the population, were Christian. Approximately 87 percent of whites were Christian and almost 1.4 percent Jewish. Nearly half (47.3 percent) of Indians were Hindu, 49 percent were either Muslim (24.6 percent) or Christian (24.4 percent), and 3.7 percent fell into other categories. The majority of Muslims were either of Indian origin, largely located in KwaZulu-Natal, or belonged to the multiethnic community in the Western Cape.

A number of Christian organizations, including the Salvation Army, Promise Keepers, Operation Mobilization, Campus Crusade, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), operated in the country doing missionary work, giving aid, and providing training. The Muslim World League also was active, as was the Zionist International Federation.

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. Leading government officials and ruling party members adhere to a variety of faiths, including various Christian denominations, Islam, and Judaism.

Only Christian holy days, such as Christmas and Good Friday, are recognized as national religious holidays; however, members of other religious groups are allowed to celebrate their religious holidays without government interference. A proposed review of public holidays suggested by the former minister of home affairs did not take place.

The government allows, but does not require, "religion education" in public schools; however, "religious instruction," or the advocating of tenets of a particular faith, is not permitted in public schools.

The government does not require religious groups to be licensed or registered.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There are many ecumenical contacts among the various churches. The largest of these is the South African Council of Churches, which represents the Methodist Church, the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), various Lutheran and Presbyterian churches, and the Congregational Church, among others. The major traditional indigenous religions, most of the Afrikaans-language churches, and the Pentecostal and charismatic churches are not members of the SACC and usually have their own coordinating and liaison bodies. The 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 were reports of killings allegedly linked to the continued targeting of purported practitioners of witchcraft, particularly in Limpopo Province. In August 2005 an elderly couple in Umlazi (KwaZulu-Natal province) suspected of practicing witchcraft were beaten, stabbed, and burned to death. Six persons were arrested and charged with murder, conspiracy to commit murder, and arson. The trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. Two men accused of the April 2005 killing of their grandmother in Ritavi, Limpopo, were convicted and sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment in April 2006.

In February 2006 a mob of approximately ninety youths set alight thirty-nine houses in four villages in Limpopo, accusing the occupants of being witches. Thirteen suspected ringleaders were charged and were due to appear in court in August. In March 2006 a group of boys burned the house of a sixty-six-year-old woman accused of witchcraft. The investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of killings linked to the practice of Satanism. The government does not keep records on cases of reported witchcraft and satanic killings. These cases are investigated and prosecuted as homicide by law enforcement officials.

While there were occasional reports of desecration and vandalism or verbal or written abuse, no violent incidents were reported during the reporting period.

Concerns about Islamic extremism have subsided since a 2002 bombing in the Western Cape that police attributed to the People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD). PAGAD is an Islamic-oriented organization opposed to crime, gangsterism, and drugs, but it has been known for violent vigilantism and acts of terrorism. The case remained under investigation, but further progress was not likely. The police have not attributed any terrorist attacks to PAGAD since the 2002 bombing.

Qibla, which traditionally has espoused Iranian Shi'ite extremist philosophies and vowed a political Jihad, is an ally of PAGAD and has an anti-U.S. and anti-Israel stance. Qibla's Shi'ite radicalism sharply contrasts with the generally conservative and apolitical Muslim community (mainly Sunni) in Cape Town. No Qibla activities were reported in the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. embassy sponsored several visitors to the United States on programs related to promoting religious tolerance. Two Fulbright scholars did Islamic Studies research in the United States. The Embassy's political counselor attended the seventh International Conference on Global Spirituality Today, held at the Muslim Rasooli Centre in Centurion. The U.S. consul general in Cape Town gave an hour-long interview to Channel Islam International, a Johannesburg-based, Islam-oriented radio service that reaches an audience of up to sixty million in Africa and the Islamic world, on the history of Islam and Muslims in the United States. The consul general hosted three iftars that targeted not only segments of Cape Town's Muslim community but also significant participation by the interfaith community. The consulate general also facilitated visiting Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes' interactions on matters of faith, tolerance, and U.S. policies with leaders of the Western Cape's Islamic community. In addition, the consul general met with a variety of local religious leaders throughout the reporting period to promote religious tolerance. The consulate general facilitated Western Cape Premier Rasool's visit with the Islamic Center during his visit to Washington, D.C. in May 2006.

Officers from the Consulate General in Durban visited the Orient Islamic Educational Institute, the largest of the seven private Islamic schools in Durban, and discussed a Fulbright Secondary Teacher Exchange program with a U.S. school. The Consulate General hosted Dr. Walter E. Fluker, Professor of Religion at Morehouse College, who addressed more than thirty leaders of various religious denominations at the Diakonia Council of Churches on "Spirituality, Ethics and Morality." Consulate General officers also met with numerous religious leaders based in Durban throughout the year, including the Anglican bishop of Natal and the Catholic cardinal and archbishop of Natal.

The Consulate General in Johannesburg sponsored an International Visitor's Program for a radio journalist with the Muslim Community Broadcasting Trust. The Consulate General also hosted two digital videoconferences on Muslim/Islamic life in the United States for local students, journalists, and Muslim organizations.

SUDAN

The July 9, 2005, Interim National Constitution provides for freedom of religion throughout the entire 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 South. Whereas the Government of Southern Sudan generally respected the rights of Christians and Muslims in the ten states of the south as provided for in its separate constitution, signed on December 5, 2005, the new Government of National Unity (GNU) continued to place restrictions on Christians in the North.

The National Congress Party (NCP) originally came to power in 1989 as the National Islamic Front (NIF); it embraces Islam as the state religion and regards Shari'a as the basis for the country's laws, institutions, and policies. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) resisted these and earlier efforts to Islamicize the country as part of a broader war for southern autonomy through the Government of Southern Sudan, which includes several minority parties. Under the CPA, these two parties entered into a coalition Government of National Unity at the national level, with the SPLM acting as the main governing party in the South. The country remained in a state of political transition, with national elections scheduled for the July 2008 to July 2009 period and a referendum on independence for the South scheduled for 2011.

The new Interim National Constitution preserved Shari'a as a source of legislation in states outside southern Sudan, and 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 constitution also recognized the national capital of Khartoum as "a symbol of national unity that reflects the diversity of Sudan." According to the constitution, the presidency shall establish the Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the national capital to ensure that non-Muslims are not adversely affected by the application of Shari'a law in Khartoum. The constitution of Southern Sudan also establishes "the traditional laws, religious beliefs, values, and customary practices of the people" as a source of legislation in the south.

The GNU continued to discriminate against Christians in the North, particularly by denying building permits for new churches. The national government required that all students in the North study Islam in school, whether or not they were Muslim, and even if enrolled in private, Christian schools. By the end of the period covered by this report, the presidency had not appointed the Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the national capital.

Relations among religious groups improved during the period covered by this report. Dialogue between Christian and Muslim groups continued under the auspices of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) supported by the Government of National Unity, and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), comprising Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant groups. The SIRC supported peace and reconciliation efforts between Christians and Muslims, sponsoring a conference on the role of religious leaders in peace building with the U.S. Institute of Peace in July 2005 and hosting an interfaith prayer service during the archbishop of Canterbury's visit to the country in February 2006.

The United States government promoted religious freedom and human rights in Sudan in its discussions with government officials and in its public diplomacy. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also funded efforts to

promote inter-religious dialogue and understanding. The United States government encouraged the GNU to fulfill the promises of religious freedom made in the CPA and the Interim National Constitution, and made clear that restrictions on religious freedom impede improved relations between the two countries. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick hosted an interfaith forum with Christian and Muslim leaders in Khartoum during his November 2005 visit. Embassy officials frequently met with leaders of different religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Sudan has an estimated population of 41 million and an area of 967,500 square miles. Exact population and demographic data were unavailable due to the long civil war, and there were no recent census figures. An estimated two-thirds to three-fourths of the population lived in the fifteen states of the North and were generally from Arabic-speaking Semitic groups. The remaining one-fourth to one-third of the population lived in the South and were mostly Nilotic peoples, some of whom have adopted English as a common language. More than four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) fled from the South to the North during the long civil war. Although several hundred thousand returned to the South after the CPA, many more still lived in and around northern cities.

Precise religious data were not available; self-reported membership totals in particular religious groups could not be confirmed, and outdated census figures may not be accurate. In general Islam predominated in the North, while traditional indigenous beliefs (animism) and Christianity were prevalent in the South. Some Muslim leaders estimated the country's Muslim population to be more than thirty-two million, or above 80 percent of the total population; almost all Muslims in the country were Sunni, with a small Shi'a community, although there were significant distinctions between followers of different Islamic traditions. The most significant divisions within the Sunni community occurred along the lines of the Sufi brotherhoods. Two popular brotherhoods, the Ansar and the Khatmia, were associated with the opposition Umma and Democratic Unionist Parties, respectively.

Traditionalists were believed to be the second largest religious group in the country, although there were reports that many had converted to Christianity or followed a syncretic form of these two faiths. Christians were generally considered the third largest group. The Roman Catholic Church estimated the number of baptized Catholics at six million, including small Melkite and Maronite communities in the north. Anglicans estimated five million followers in the Episcopal Church of Sudan and the dissident Reformed Episcopal Church. There were small but long established groups of Orthodox Christians in Khartoum and other northern cities, including several thousand Coptic Orthodox and a few hundred Greek Orthodox Christians. There were significant Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities in Khartoum and Eastern Sudan, largely drawn from refugees and migrants. Other Christian groups with smaller followings in the country included 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. The size of the country's Jewish community decreased drastically over the past twenty years, when mass emigration led to the closure of the synagogue in Khartoum; however, a small group of Jews still lived in the capital.

The country's traditional division between the Muslim north and the Christian south reflected the social policies of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial administration (1898–1956), under which Christian missionary activity was encouraged in the South but restricted in the North, while the spread of Islam was tolerated in the North but prohibited in the South. Though these policies were no longer in effect, they continue to influence the country's religious demography. The GNU officially permits foreign missionary groups in both North and South, although in practice Christian missionaries were largely confined to the South or to existing Christian communities in the North, due to Shari'a (Islamic law), strong social pressure against proselytizing, and existing laws against apostasy.

With the exception of displaced Southerners, most Christians in the North were descended from remnants of pre-Islamic era communities or trading families that immigrated from Egypt or the Near East before independence (1956); at the same time, many Muslims in the South were shopkeepers or small business owners who sought economic opportunities during the civil war. These 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 a minority group controlled a disproportionate share of the wealth.

Religion also played a role in the country's political system. Northern Muslims have dominated the country's political and economic system since independence. The National Congress Party (NCP) drew much of its support from Islamists, Wahhabis, and other conservative Arab Muslims in the north; the Umma Party 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) included both Arab and non-Arab Muslims in the North and East, especially those followers of the Khatmia Sect of Sufism, as well as some northern Arabic-speaking Christians. Southern Christians generally supported the SPLM or one of the smaller southern parties.

The ongoing conflict in Darfur between the government-backed Arab Muslim militias (janjaweed) and non-Arab Muslim rebels did not center on religious differences but rather on political, economic, and ethnic issues.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Religious groups are required by law to register with the government as non-governmental organizations, although this requirement did not appear to be enforced. Religious organizations that do not register as non-governmental, non-profit organizations, cannot legally claim exemption from taxes and import duties. Some of the largest Christian religious groups have historically refused to register out of fear of government interference. Religious groups that have opted to register, such as the Coptic Church, have been exempt from property taxes.

The April 2006 Humanitarian and Voluntary Work Act requires all foreign NGOs, including religious groups, to register with the Government. It ostensibly applies to both Christian and Muslim groups, but there has been insufficient time to see how it is applied in practice. In prior years, the SCC had complained that a similar act, which this one supersedes, was unfairly applied.

The new Interim National Constitution that took effect on July 9, 2005, provides for freedom of worship throughout the entire country; the constitution of Southern Sudan, signed on December 5, 2005, also provides for freedom of worship in the ten states of the South. Although the GNU did not directly interfere in the right of citizens to practice the religion of their choice, it restricted to some extent when, where, and how Christians in the North were permitted to worship. The Government of Southern Sudan generally respected the rights of southerners to practice the religion of their choice.

The country's legal and policy framework affecting religious freedom changed dramatically following the CPA. Although the Interim National Constitution applies to the entire country, it has in effect created separate legal systems in the North and the South.

Shari'a is a source of legislation in the fifteen states of the North. Conversion from Islam to another religion is considered apostasy. Under the CPA, non-Muslims in Khartoum are exempt from penalties prescribed by Shari'a but not from national and state laws based on Shari'a. In addition, the rights of non-Muslims in the capital are to be guaranteed by a special presidential commission, which is expected to assist the government in advising courts on how to apply Shari'a law to non-Muslims. On January 3, 2006, the president announced his intention to create the Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the National Capital; however, by the end of the period covered by this report there had been no presidential decree to create this Commission.

Shari'a is no longer a source of legislation in the ten states of the South under the Interim National Constitution and the constitution of Southern Sudan. The region's legal and regulatory framework remains a combination of inherited national law, laws adopted by the Government of Southern Sudan, traditional practice, and provisional decisions.

The Government of Southern Sudan has established a special court in Juba, the Southern capital, for prosecuting crimes committed for religious reasons, particularly by Christians seeking revenge against Muslims. There were reports that the court has tried several cases, and the Muslim leaders in Juba stated that it appeared to offer adequate protection to Muslims. There was no equivalent institution in the North.

Under the Interim National Constitution, Sudan is a "multi-religious state" and "an all embracing homeland wherein religions exist in harmony"; moreover, the constitution is based on the principle that the country's "religions, beliefs, customs, and traditions are a source of moral strength and inspiration for the Sudanese people." However, because the constitution preserves the role of Shari'a in the north, it effectively establishes Islam as the state religion in that region. Neither the Interim Na-

tional Constitution nor the constitution of Southern Sudan establish a state religion in the South, although traditionalism and Christianity are dominant. All courts in the South are secular.

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 two hours before 10:00 a.m. on Sunday for religious purposes, but 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.

Government of Southern Sudan offices and businesses in the south follow the western workweek, with Sunday as a day of religious observance. Employers in the South generally do not give their Muslim employees two 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.

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. However, this requirement did not appear to be enforced in the South. Enforcement in the North was sporadic and not as strict as it was several years ago. Permits for new mosques in the North are generally issued, although Muslim leaders complained the process was cumbersome and time-consuming. Moreover, according to Christian leaders, permits for new churches have been either denied outright or delayed for years. However, according to the SIRC, the Khartoum State Ministry of Planning and Public Utilities issued a permit for a new Episcopal church at Al Hazari, Khartoum, on July 23, 2005, and a permit for a new Church of Christ place of worship at Al Thawra, Omdurman, on May 24, 2006; these appeared to be the first permits issued for a new church since 1975. The ministry was also reported to be in the process of approving other permits, including one for a Catholic church at Al Bakara, Khartoum. However, other obstacles remained, including a group of squatters preventing work on the new Episcopal church site at Al Hazari, and many Christian leaders remained skeptical that the Government would allow new churches to be built.

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. In addition, 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.

The educational system in the South 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 Government of National Unity has promised to return the University to Juba in time, although there has been little progress to date.

The Government of National Unity has supported interfaith dialogue through the SIRC. Though the SIRC is officially an NGO, the government provides much of its funding. In July 2005 the SIRC together with the U.S. Institute of Peace sponsored a conference on the role of religious leaders in peacekeeping. It also hosted an interfaith prayer service in February 2006 in honor of the archbishop of Canterbury's visit to Khartoum, which was attended by senior government officials.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The GNU restricted where Christians in the North were permitted to worship and how they were permitted to practice. Obtaining permits to build new churches remained a long and tortuous process, despite recent improvements. There were still several outstanding requests from previous years, and it was not clear whether any new permits were requested during the reporting period. In addition, according to some Christian leaders, the GNU had pressured existing churches in central Khartoum to move to less conspicuous locations on the outskirts of the capital, and it

preferred to keep new Christian facilities outside the city center. 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 the spread of 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 not only exacerbated problems in the relationship between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority but 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. At the same time, the Government continued to restrict conversions from Islam to other faiths, which is officially considered apostasy. On May 14, 2006, an Episcopal priest and three other Christians were arrested after meeting with a Muslim woman who wanted to convert to Christianity. They were released after several days.

The Government of Southern Sudan 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. In January 2006 the government of Upper Nile State 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 state government has reclaimed the property of the Nasir Islamic Qur'an Institute, which was seized by the national government several years ago from a Christian group; the government of Central Equatoria State took a similar action in March 2006 against Qur'an al-Kariim University, formerly Juba Girls' Secondary School. The Upper Nile State Ministry of Finance has closed Islamic banks in Malakal, citing the CPA's provisions for the establishment of a conventional banking system in the South.

Although the GNU has not banned any specific religious group, it favored Islam over Christianity 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 the Al-Ansar and its political wing, the Umma National Party, also claimed to suffer discrimination by Islamists in the governing National Congress Party, although it was unclear whether the alleged discrimination was due to religious or political affiliation. Some Muslims in the North also complained that the GNU was attempting to curry favor with the West by placing Christian leaders, including a dissident Episcopal bishop and a prominent Coptic Orthodox priest, in high positions of power within the government. According to these allegations, these Christian officials used their power to reward their followers by directing government contracts and other business to their followers' companies.

Muslims in the South complained of economic discrimination and boycotts by Christians, although such actions did not appear to be supported by the Government of Southern Sudan. During the August 1, 2005, riots, after the death of First Vice President John Garang, Muslim-owned businesses were burned down in Juba. Muslims in Juba were intimated, threatened, and harassed to leave Juba. The SPLM issued statements against violence towards Muslims in Juba. Tensions remained in Juba with many Muslims believing they were unwanted there despite their long presence in the area that predated independence. The most common complaint from Muslims in the South was late-night threats and racial epithets from inebriated Christian southerners who equated Islam with northern oppression during the long civil war.

The Government continued to refuse to act on many applications to build new churches in the North, although it issued two permits for new churches in suburban Khartoum during the period covered by this report. The need for new church facilities is particularly great in IDP camps on the outskirts of Khartoum, where southern Christians fled during the civil war. Most existing churches in the capital date from the colonial era and are located near the city center. As a result, relatively few Christians have the time or means to travel over twenty miles to church during their two hours of "religious time" on Sunday mornings. This policy not only discourages Christians from practicing their faith, but also enables the government to publicly claim that new churches are not needed because the existing ones are underutilized.

Some Christians living in IDP camps have established their own congregations and built "prayer houses" without obtaining permits, though these facilities have been subject to Government condemnation and destruction in the past. The Catholic Church routinely builds "activity centers" near IDP camps which function as churches, though without official permits.

Though the Government has issued two permits for new churches in suburban Khartoum, some Christian leaders believe the GNU has continued the previous regime's attempts to drive churches and other Christian institutions out of the capital's center. Previous governments routinely confiscated church property in the city, most notably the former All Saints Episcopal Cathedral (1971) and the Catholic Club (1998). Episcopal Church of Sudan officials alleged that the NCP government prompted the 2004 sale of the Church's Khartoum headquarters and guesthouse by a dissident Episcopal bishop. According to Episcopal and Catholic officials, the Government has yet to provide adequate compensation for all confiscated church property, though the Sudan Inter-Religious Council has helped both churches reclaim some properties in Omdurman and suburban Khartoum.

In 2006, some churches in the South received appropriate compensation from the Government of Southern Sudan for property seized by earlier governments. In March 2006, the Archbishop of Canterbury consecrated a new Episcopal cathedral in Renk, replacing an earlier building that had been confiscated to build a new road. Other Christian groups in the South are expected to regain properties currently occupied by the Sudan Armed Forces, the Sudan People's Liberation Army, or various Islamic groups.

Some Christian leaders have accused the GNU of pressuring churches to sell their older properties in central Khartoum by offering them a high sales price, but denying the churches permission to redevelop the properties themselves and take advantage of the booming real estate market. Other church officials allege that once a church has bought land in a particular residential area for possible future construction, the Government will re-zone the area for industrial or commercial use, or plan to build a road through the church's property. These officials see such tactics as the new government's less public, less confrontational alternative to confiscating church property.

Although there is no penalty for converting from another religion to Islam, converting from Islam to another religion is considered apostasy under Shari'a, and is punishable by death in the North. In practice, however, this penalty was rarely carried out. The last case of apostasy was prosecuted in 1985, and involved a Muslim who questioned Muslim beliefs but did not attempt to convert to another religion. Muslims in the North who do attempt to convert to another faith, however, were generally regarded as outcasts by their families and face severe social pressure to recant.

The Interim National Constitution and the constitution of Southern Sudan specifically prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion for candidates for the National Civil Service, though Muslims have traditionally been chosen for these positions over Christians. However, with the creation of the GNU in July 2005, Christians are represented in the Vice Presidential and Cabinet level of the national government for the first time since independence. There has also been a marked increase in the number of Christian members in the National Assembly and the Council of States. There are many Christian lawyers in the North, and several Christian judges for civil law cases involving non-Muslims.

The Interim National Constitution and the constitution of southern Sudan also deny recognition to any political party that discriminates on the basis of religion.

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 acknowledge that they usually refrain from preaching on political or other sensitive topics to avoid harassment by the authorities. Some Muslim imams prefer to avoid political topics in their preaching as well though others seem to show less restraint.

Proselytizing by any religious group in the country is not prohibited, though strong Muslim social pressures in the north against proselytizing and Shari'a penalties for apostasy that are part of the North's legal code, effectively limit Christian missionary activities in the region. Some foreign missionary groups operated in the North, though their work is officially limited to education or services to southern Christian IDPs. Missionaries also continued to operate in the South, running relief operations, medical clinics, and churches. Many Christian religious workers experienced delays in getting visas, though this is common for almost all visa applicants from Western countries. The government also controls 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 articles religious, and the Episcopal Church of Sudan operates a religious bookstore in central Khartoum. However, newspaper editors admitted to self-censorship regarding articles on certain controversial topics.

On May 4, 2005, Mohamed Taha, the Shi'a editor-in-chief of Al Wafaq daily newspaper, faced criminal charges of defaming religion when he republished an article with contentious assertions regarding the origins of the Prophet Muhammad. He was detained for a few hours, returned to his job, and was later acquitted. Al Wafaq, which was shut down for a few days, resumed operations.

Public preaching and processions are allowed throughout the country. Muslim sermons are commonly broadcast over loudspeakers in the north, and can be heard well outside the walls of mosques. However, Christian leaders say that they were cautious about preaching outside of their churches, or leading public processions; they usually limit these activities to Christmas and Easter celebrations.

There was little Christian programming in the North, and little local broadcasting of any kind in the South.

Religious symbols are permitted throughout the country. Mosques may announce a call to prayer, though some mosques in the South were no longer allowed to use loudspeakers. Churches could erect crosses on their property and ring bells to announce the beginning of services.

Public schools in the North officially permit Christian students to wear a cross. Although the social pressure for women to wear headscarves in public has decreased, pressure remained for women in universities, both Muslim and non-Muslim, to wear headscarves to classes.

Wine was always used at Catholic Mass in the South; however, it was used infrequently at Mass in the North due to the prohibition on the consumption or sale of alcohol.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In May 2006, there were reports that four Christian leaders, including an Episcopal priest and a Catholic priest, were arrested after meeting with a Muslim woman who wanted to convert to Christianity. All four were denied access to legal counsel for two days; three were beaten by officers of the National Intelligence and Security Service before being released. The woman was not charged with apostasy, but was returned to her family despite some concerns that they would beat her.

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, though others note that many Muslim families were too embarrassed to draw public attention to the matter.

Forced Religious Conversion

Although there is 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 of the Republic frequently ended his public speeches with a call for victory over the "infidels," and state media outlets routinely referred to Christians as "non-believers." Christian parents reported that their children enrolled in public school were commonly asked why they are not Muslims.

There were reports that Sudanese Armed Forces in the South were rewarding Southerners who convert to Islam and inducing non-Muslims in the military to convert to Islam in advance of the 2011 referendum on Southern independence,

Sudanese law makes a distinction between "orphans" and "children of unknown parents." If a child's parents have died or are no longer able to take care of the child, the child is considered to be of the same religion as his parents. However, if a child's parents are unknown, the child is generally treated as a Muslim, at least in the North. There have been rare cases where Christian families were allowed to adopt Muslim children of unknown parentage, but Christian families must generally adopt children whose parents were known to be Christian.

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 adoption of the Interim National Constitution and the constitution of Southern Sudan removed Shari'a as a source of legislation in the South. The Interim National Constitution also stated that non-Muslims would not be adversely affected by the application of Shari'a law in the North.

Some church property confiscated by previous governments has been returned to it original owners, though many claims remain outstanding. In 2005, the GNU, working through the Sudan Inter-Religious Council, returned St. Catherine's Hospital in Omdurman to the Episcopal Church of Sudan, and gave three plots of land

in Khartoum to the Roman Catholic Church as partial compensation for the seizure of the Catholic Club in 1998. The Government has also issued two permits for new churches in suburban Khartoum during the period covered by this report, and is in the process of issuing a third.

In 2006, the Government of Southern Sudan donated land to the Episcopal Church for a new cathedral in Renk, to replace a church that was demolished several years earlier to make way for a new road. The Government of Southern Sudan also prepared to return property seized and used as Islamic colleges in Nasir and Juba to their original Christian owners.

The SPLM also announced in May 2006 that it would press the GNU to act on claims for all outstanding church property issues, including that of the former All Saints Episcopal Cathedral and the Catholic Club in Khartoum.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Religion is an important factor in society, though it often overlaps with other racial, ethnic, and linguistic factors. Nevertheless, relations between individuals of different religious backgrounds were often good on a personal level, though government policy in the past had frequently undermined an atmosphere of religious tolerance. The signing of the CPA and the adoption of the Interim National Constitution marked a change in these policies and contributed to improved relations between Muslims and Christians.

The SIRC played an active role in promoting inter-religious dialogue and understanding. Though the SIRC was officially a NGO, it received much of its funding from the GNU. It includes a forty-six-member General Assembly, with an equal number of Muslims and Christians, which in turn elects a twelve-member Executive Board, also with equal numbers of Muslims and Christians.

The SCC includes twelve Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches in Northern and Southern Sudan. The SCC generally cooperated with the SIRC, though some SCC members have expressed concerns that the SIRC is too close to the government.

Other Christian leaders have expressed reservations about the power of the SIRC to help regain church property, noting that it has had only limited success to date. Some have also expressed concerns with the SCC, complaining that it is prone to corruption and infighting.

Some Muslim leaders are also skeptical that the SIRC truly represents the Muslims of the country, because most Muslim members of the SIRC avoid politics or refrain from criticizing the National Islamic Front and National Congress Party.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States government encouraged respect for religious freedom in is discussions with the GNU, and urged it to fulfill the promise of religious freedom made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Interim National Constitution. The United States 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. In addition to this report, the embassy also provided regular updates to the Department of State and other agencies on the state of religious groups in the country, and on the challenges they face.

The embassy's Public Diplomacy section has developed working relationships with a number of Muslim and Christian leaders. A visiting "Islam in America" speaker in late October 2005 expanded contacts with Muslim institutions, and the embassy sponsored a leading Sufi Muslim cleric for the International Visitor Program.

On the occasion of the Deputy Secretary Zoellick's visit in November, the Public Diplomacy section organized a seminal roundtable that brought together leading Muslim and Christian leaders. The embassy also maintains contact with key figures in the country's religious communities through occasional individual meetings and mailings of articles and reports relating to religious freedom.

USAID's Office of Transitional Issues (OTI) provided a grant to the SIRC in 2005 to assist with publication of a booklet on "Religion and the CPA." OTI also provided funding for a dozen seminars that brought together Christian and Muslim leaders to discuss the CPA.

From 1999–2005, 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 to abstain on or oppose loans or other use of the funds of International Financial Institutions to or for Sudan (International Financial Institutions Act).

SWAZILAND

The country's first constitution in more than thirty years, which went into effect on February 8, 2006, provides for freedom of religion. The Government generally respected freedom of religion in practice, although authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that they believed to have political implications. The original draft of the constitution declared Christianity the country's official religion, but during final debates the provision was dropped.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 6,700 square miles and a population of 1.1 million. Christianity was the dominant religion. Zionism, a blend of Christianity and indigenous ancestral worship, was the predominant religion in rural areas. A large Roman Catholic presence, including churches, schools, and other infrastructure, continued to flourish. The population was approximately 35 percent Protestant, 30 percent Zionist, 25 percent Catholic, and 1 percent Muslim. The remaining 9 percent of the population was divided among the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, the Baha'i Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Judaism, and other religious groups. Followers of Islam and the Baha'i Faith generally were located in urban areas. There were few atheists.

Missionaries inspired much of the country's early development and continued to play a role in rural development. A majority of missionaries were western Christians, including Baptists, Mormons, evangelical groups, and other Christian faiths. The Baha'i Faith was one of the most active non-Christian 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.

Article 23 of the constitution states that individuals have a right to "freedom of thought, conscience, or religion." The original draft of the constitution declared Christianity the country's official religion, but during the final debate that provision was dropped. The country had not had a constitution since 1973. Religious and other civil society groups have frequently denounced the drafting process for allowing input only from individuals and not from groups. 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 all national holidays. The monarchy (and by extension the Government) supports many Christian activities. The royal family occasionally attended various evangelical programs, including Good Friday and Ascension worship services at the national stadium in the Ezulwini Valley, hosted by participating churches of the local evangelical movement. King Mswati III used the Easter Weekend service to call for the construction of a national church and pledged $57,400 (E350,000) of his own money towards its construction.

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 re-

ligions. 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.

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. Religious groups have access to the courts as private entities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Followers of all religious faiths generally were free to worship without government interference or restriction, although there were exceptions.

Authorities on occasion disrupted or cancelled prayer meetings that were considered to have political implications. In 2004 police and security forces disrupted a prayer vigil held by local residents commemorating the four year anniversary of the Macetjeni/KaMkhweli evictions. Residents of KaMkhweli and Macetjeni were evicted in 2000 for refusing to transfer their allegiance from their traditional chiefs to Prince Maguga, a brother of the king.

Local, traditional leaders sometimes discriminated against members of Jehovah's Witnesses, although such actions were often reversed by higher judicial institutions. On May 7, 2005, traditional leaders fined the family of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses one cow because the woman refused to wear mourning clothes after her husband's death.

The three primary school children of Jehovah's Witnesses who were expelled in 2004 for refusing to pray during school assemblies were reinstated by court order on September 2, 2005. The court order has allowed members of Jehovah's Witnesses to refrain from praying during school assemblies, but no formal government policy exists. On November 11, 2005, the Court of Appeal ordered a chief to return five cows seized in 2003 from a member of Jehovah's Witnesses who refused to allow his daughters to wear the virginity tassels as ordered by the king.

On June 23, 2005, the Court of Appeal ruled that the University of Swaziland's failure to accommodate a student's religious obligation was an infringement of his freedom of religion. In May 2004 the first year university law student, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, failed his course because he refused to take his final exam because it was offered on a Saturday, and Seventh-day Adventists refrain from secular work, including academic activities, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, the day they observe as the Sabbath.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. For example, five different denominations 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, such as support for a constitutional amendment to allow for freedom of religion.

Several very conservative clergymen urged the Government to declare the country uniquely Christian.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The status of respect for religious freedom improved during the later half of the reporting period. Improvements in the respect for freedom of religion and the dissipation of religious tensions during the reporting period where facilitated by the appointment of Muslims to key administrative positions following the December 2005 general elections.

Although the perception of discrimination shifted from some Muslims under the previous administration to some Christians under the new administration, the perceived favoritism towards certain religious groups did not negatively impact the practice of religion in either circumstance. Despite the increased representation of Muslims in the Government, the generally amicable relations among religions in society still experienced some tension between Muslims and Christians and, in a few cases, between secular and fundamentalist Muslims. In Zanzibar, some Muslims remained concerned that the 2001 Mufti Law, which allows the Zanzibari government to appoint a mufti for the purposes of overseeing Muslim organizations and acting as a liaison with the Government, continued to permit undue government control of religious affairs.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 364,900 square miles and a population of approximately 36 million, of which an estimated 35 million live on the mainland and 1 million on the Zanzibar archipelago. Current statistics on religious demography were unavailable, because the Government does not track the religious affiliation of its citizens, and religious surveys were eliminated from all government census reports after 1967. Religious leaders and sociologists generally estimated that the Christian and Muslim populations were approximately equal, each accounting for 30 to 40 percent of the population, with the remainder consisting of atheists and practitioners of other faiths and indigenous religions.

The Muslim population was most heavily concentrated on the Zanzibar archipelago, which was estimated to be 99 percent Muslim. On the mainland, Muslim communities were concentrated in the coastal areas, with some large Muslim minorities in inland urban areas.

Between 80 and 90 percent of the country's Muslim population was Sunni; the remainder consisted of several Shi'a groups, mostly of Asian descent. The Christian population was 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, including Assemblies of God, Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist, Mormon, Anglican, and Muslim groups, operated in the country. Catholic groups primarily engaged in social services, while Muslim missionaries focused on teaching in mosques and local schools. Assemblies of God increasingly engaged in building churches, particularly in rural and remote areas.

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 state religion and recognizes eight 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. Despite these discussions, on April 23, 2006, a front-page newspaper article, prompted by the appointment of a Muslim to the post of Inspector General, criticized the Government for allowing elements of religious bias to creep into the Government of President Kikwete.

Historically, some urban Muslim groups have perceived discrimination in government hiring and law enforcement practices. This perceived discrimination amongst Muslims prompted the new Union administration, led by President Jakaya Kikwete, to appoint Muslims to sensitive government positions including the vice presidency, ambassadorships, and ministerial positions in the Ministries of Defense, Finance, and Foreign Affairs. These appointments were met with approval by Muslims and with resentment by some Christians. A June 28, 2006, article in the Guardian newspaper quoted the Catholic archbishop as urging President Kikwete to review the system used in recruiting civil servants in the public security organizations.

A semi-autonomous archipelago, Zanzibar elects its own president to serve as the head of government for matters internal to Zanzibar, and a parliament that can approve legislation pertaining to local affairs. The 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.

The Mufti Law continued to be controversial during the reporting period because some Muslim groups viewed it as giving the Zanzibari government undue influence in religious affairs. The Zanzibari Ministry of Good Governance declared in 2004 that it would establish a review committee to consider possible revisions to the Mufti Law; however, no such committee had been formed by the close of this reporting period. 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. 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 the review committee begins to function. For example, in a departure from previous policy, the Office of the Mufti quietly engaged in a dialogue with Saudi-line Muslim groups such as Uamsho, a fundamentalist organization that does not recognize Zanzibar's Mufti Law and serves as an umbrella for other Islamic groups. Following these discussions, Uamsho reported that they held twelve religious rallies, all without undue interference from government agencies.

On the mainland, mosques belonging to the National Muslim Council of Tanzania (BAKWATA) elect a mufti of their own who, unlike in Zanzibar, is not a public servant. BAKWATA serves as an NGO; however, when it was first established in 1968, BAKWATA was widely considered to be an unofficial arm of the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), and public opinion still associated BAKWATA with the ruling CCM party. During the reporting period, several Muslim organizations continued to criticize both Zanzibar's Mufti Law and the mainland's practice of selecting a mufti through BAKWATA, perceiving them as efforts by the Government to institutionalize government oversight of Islamic organizations.

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 ten 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. Some Muslim groups on the mainland claimed that they were also required to submit a letter of recommendation from BAKWATA; however, such groups did not report any difficul-

ties in obtaining one. There were no reports that the Government refused the registration of any group.

The law requires all NGOs, including those that are religiously affiliated, to register with the Ministry of Home Affairs. The NGO law does not impose any new obligations on the parent organizations of religiously affiliated NGOs. 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 society. In 2006 the mufti recommended approval of at least one group (which sends Muslims to Mecca for the Hajj) and recommended denial of registration for two groups associated with the Baha'i faith and the Ahmadiyya, claiming that there were contradictions between the beliefs of these groups and the Islamic faith. The Ahmadiyya filed suit against the office of the mufti because of this recommendation; the case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Customary and statutory law governs Christians in both criminal and civil cases. Muslims are also governed by customary and statutory law in criminal cases; however, in civil cases involving family matters such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, Islamic law is applied if both parties are Muslims.

Some Christian judges on the mainland continued to administer Islamic law for civil cases involving family law where all the parties involved were Muslims. Some Muslim groups continued to 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.

Muslims held a number of influential positions in the legal and political systems. The majority of judges on Zanzibar were Muslim. On the mainland a Muslim continued to serve as Principal Judge and, in this capacity, oversaw the work of other judges. Another Muslim judge was appointed as permanent representative to the mission of the United Nations.

Religious organizations occasionally appealed to the secular civil authorities for assistance in resolving quasi-religious disputes over the ownership of places of worship or the leadership of religious organizations. For example, in late 2004 the Tanzanian Lutheran Confederation (KKT) replaced its secretary general. The deposed secretary general brought a lawsuit seeking his reinstatement. During the reporting period, the court case concluded with the secretary general not being reinstated, and the plaintiff was ordered to pay damages to the defendants.

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.

Many schools and universities were associated with missionaries, particularly since 2005 when the Government returned schools to the Catholic Church that were nationalized during the socialist era.

The country's first Muslim university opened in Morogoro in April 2006, two years after former president Benjamin Mkapa transferred government-owned office buildings to the Muslim Development Foundation for this purpose.

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 association. Unlike in public schools, some private schools make religious classes compulsory for all their students.

In 2005 BAKWATA proposed that the Government pay the salaries of Islamic religion teachers and develop a curriculum that addressed sexual behavior, HIV/AIDS, and drug abuse. The Government initially agreed but said it would leave to BAKWATA the authority to approve Islamic religion teachers. Fundamental Islamic clerics opposed BAKWATA's authority over teacher selection and the development of the proposed curriculum. The Government then decided not to implement the policies proposed by BAKWATA, and the tension over religious education partially abated.

The Government made some efforts to reduce the tensions between Muslim and Christian communities, which had been escalating in the lead-up to the elections in October 2005. Tensions stemmed from historical disparities between economic and educational opportunities available to Muslims and Christians and were exacerbated by some public rallies at which religious debate resulted in physical altercations.

To promote religious tolerance, President Jakaya Kikwete and Vice President Ali Mohamed Shein, both Muslims, participated regularly in Christian events such as inaugurations and fundraising activities of churches. Government officials frequently participated in interdenominational events sponsored by NGOs. In an address to the Union parliament on December 30, 2005, President Kikwete also said that he wanted to see close cooperation between the Government and political and religious leaders.

The president of Zanzibar, Amani Abeid Karume, also supported interfaith initiatives. On May 3, 2006, President Karume inaugurated a one-day seminar for Christian and Muslim religious leaders in Zanzibar, asking them to participate actively in peace-building programs. Two days later, a newspaper article reported the progress of these efforts, adding that religious leaders from forty-three Christian and Muslim groups had met for a joint prayer service and discussion of how religious institutions could work together for peace.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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 parties that campaign in houses of worship or educational facilities. None of these penalties were imposed during the reporting period, including during the general election period between October and December 2005, although laws may have been infringed. The lack of enforcement was a result of the Government and politicians not wanting to create additional tension between religious groups and political parties during an election year.

The law also prohibits preaching or distributing material that is considered inflammatory and represents a threat to public order. Government officials occasionally denied permits to religious organizations requesting to hold public gatherings if they believed that that the gathering could become confrontational or inflame religious tensions. For example, in May 2005 district authorities in Mbeya denied a permit to the Salvation Pentecost of Tanzania International after they claimed that the group's recent evangelical public meetings had turned into abusive campaigns against Islam.

In May 2005 Zanzibar authorities also prevented Islamic activist Sheikh Kurwa Shauri, a mainlander, from entering Zanzibar on the grounds that his preaching was considered a threat to the peace. Shauri had previously been arrested, released, and forced to return to Dar Es Salaam in 2004 after being charged with violating a 1993 order on disrupting the peace and fomenting interreligious conflict. These charges came after Shauri had advocated the use of violence against Zanzibar officials and tourists to the islands and distributed tapes of his teachings that were considered seditious material. As no one on Zanzibar would testify against Shauri, the authorities deported him to the mainland.

The Government does not designate religion on passports or records of vital statistics; however, it requires an individual's religion to be stated on police reports, school registration forms, and applications for medical care. The Government reportedly requires individuals to indicate their religion in police reports in case individuals are later asked to give sworn testimony for which they would need to swear in court 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 religious instruction.

Government policy forbids discrimination against individuals on the basis of religious beliefs or practices; however, individual government and business officials were believed to favor conducting business with persons who shared the same religion. Such favoritism was based on the perceived loyalty that a shared religion was believed to bring to a professional setting.

Unlike in the previous year, the Muslim community did not claim to be disadvantaged in terms of its representation in the government, civil service, or other parastatal institutions.

Despite improvements in their political representation, Muslim leaders continued to complain that the number of Muslim students chosen to enroll in government-run schools was not equal to the number of Christians. Christian leaders continued to agree that the Muslim student population in institutions of higher learning was disproportionately low; however, they attributed this condition to historical circumstances (the legacy of colonial and early post-independence government policies that did not recognize the credentials of traditional Muslim schools) and low daily school attendance rates by Muslims, rather than discrimination. Many Christians and Muslims also attributed the educational disparity between Muslim and Chris-

tians to the disproportional emphasis that Islamic schools continued to place on religion at the expense of other academic subjects.

Some Christian groups accused the current administration of religious bias against Christians during the reporting period, 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. Some Christians also attributed religious discrimination against Christians to what they understood to be the lingering effects of undue favoritism accorded to Muslims in appointments, jobs, and scholarships by former president Ali Hassan Mwinyi, a Muslim.

On Zanzibar, the 2001 Mufti Act gives the mufti the authority to determine the date of major religious observances. The Saudi-oriented group, Answaru Sunna, has been involved in a long-running dispute with the Zanzibar government over which Muslim leaders had the authority to determine annual religious observances. In past years, Zanzibari police have broken up public gatherings of Answaru Sunna and arrested the participants because they were observing Muslim holidays on the "wrong" day. In November 2005, however, Answaru Sunna publicly observed Eid al-Fitr on a day other than that designated by the mufti without incident and without interference.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On February 12, 2006, a newspaper reported that a church in the Kigamboni Temeke district of Dar Es Salaam was burnt to the ground a few days after robbers had ransacked it. A week later, BAKWATA officials issued a statement denouncing the church's petrol bombing, which was being attributed to certain sections of the Muslim community. The March 12 edition of the same paper reported that a government official working at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism was behind the petrol-bomb destruction of the church in February. On May 7, another weekly newspaper reported that the local government told the church to stop its services pending investigations. On May 14, a third newspaper reported that the church had appealed to the State House, accusing the Temeke Municipal Council of interfering with their right to worship and alleging that certain government officials wanted to make Temeke district a Muslim bastion. The Government did not provide a response to these allegations, and no arrests were made in connection with these incidents.

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 Muslim-Christian relations remained stable in rural areas; however, some tension persisted in urban centers due to perceptions by some Muslim or Christian groups that the Government favored the other community in its hiring or law enforcement practices. Tensions between moderate Muslims and Muslim fundamentalists were eased following the October 2005 elections as the latter expressed satisfaction with appointments of Muslims to key government positions. During the elections, interdenominational dialogues and initiatives existing at the national and community levels without formal government sponsorship helped to prevent religion from becoming a political fault line on which to justify societal violence. Muslim-Christian relations, in particular, benefited from these initiatives. An interdenominational religious council, composed of Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim representatives, continued to meet periodically, on an ad-hoc basis, to discuss issues of mutual concern. Between January and June 2006 the council met three times and discussed topics including: factors that contributed or could contribute to societal breaches of the peace, how political parties behaved during the 2005 elections, and whether political parties could have contributed to the disruption of national unity. These discussions followed an earlier meeting in Tanga on May 10, 2005, during which the council issued a five-point statement urging religious and political leaders to behave ethically and take concrete steps to promote social peace during the October election campaign. Early in 2006 the council also formed a committee to develop a framework for promoting a religious union between Muslim groups and the three major Christian denominations (Protestant, Catholic, and Pentecostal). Multifaith collaborations were also evidenced by a news report on January 8, 2006, which stated that BAKWATA met with Catholic and Lutheran churches to discuss how best to create vocational training institutes, schools, and higher learning institutions for the good of the community.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of fundamentalists criticizing moderate Muslim organizations, such as BAKWATA, for reaching out to other religions. In 2006, for example, the Mufti's Office sponsored three seminars for Christian and Muslim clerics, the theme of which was tolerance. In March representatives from 43 Muslim and Christian denominations met to have a special thanksgiving prayer service to celebrate and give thanks for the peaceful beginning of the first 200 days of the administration of President Kikwete.

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, rather than the promotion of Islam. The sheikhs also criticized the Mufti's Office for not making a statement condemning Danish cartoons that were perceived as mocking Mohammed.

There was a significant increase in reported killings of elderly individuals suspected of being witches. On February 27, 2006, the brutal axing of a woman suspected of being a witch was reported in a newspaper. On May 11, 2006, a newspaper reported that a man was killed after he was accused of being a witch. There was no additional information regarding the status of investigations into these cases available at the close of the reporting period; however, the Government strongly condemned the killing of witches and prosecuted offenders. The Government held seminars for local government officials and attended workshops run by NGOs in an effort to sensitize the public on the evils of killing suspected witches. During the reporting period, there were articles in newspapers and the electronic media condemning the practice.

Investigations into the September 2005 beatings of a Christian pastor and deacon, and the attack by Muslim youths on a group of primary school religion teachers for teaching Muslim students about Christianity, both in Dar Es Salaam, were pending at the close of the reporting period. Also pending at the end of the reporting period was an investigation into the burning of a Catholic church in Morogoro region in April 2005.

SECTION IV. U.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.

Embassy representatives often extended their contacts and encouraged dialogue among a wide range of religious leaders during the reporting period. For example, in April 2006 embassy representatives attended the opening of a Muslim university in Morogoro. The embassy established an American Corner at the Zanzibar State University.

In addition to its outreach outside of the embassy, the embassy hosted several groups of Muslim high school students at the Information Resource Center as part of a series of outreach programs to Muslim groups living on the Swahili Coast. Students engaged with speakers, watched a film on Islam in America, and were given materials that explained the role of religious freedom and diversity in America.

The embassy organized a speaker program in Dar Es Salaam and Zanzibar on Islam in the United States that featured a renowned female Islamic scholar. At these events, U.S. State Department-produced posters and pamphlets highlighting the role of religious freedom in the United States were distributed.

In March 2006 the embassy organized a youth leadership speaker program that featured an American imam who spoke to youth at locations in Dar Es Salaam and Zanzibar on the importance of sound leadership and the role of the youths in national development. He noted self-reliance, problem solving, and networking as key aspects of progress, and he highlighted the country as an example of the harmonious relationships that can exist between different faiths. He added that the youth needed to ensure that this harmony continued so that the country continued to be a model for other nations in this respect.

In 2005 the embassy sponsored a series of civic education seminars for Christian and Muslim clergy and young persons who were active in their churches and mosques. One seminar, conducted in April by the interdenominational Global Network for Religions and Children, brought together religious activists from throughout Dar Es Salaam for discussions on the need for the peaceful and democratic con-

duct of the upcoming elections. During that year, the Global Network for Religions and Children also organized two major peace camps, one of which was held in conjunction with the Zanzibar Film Festival.

In the months leading up to the general election, embassy officials were especially proactive in encouraging dialogue among religious groups on Zanzibar.

On December 22, 2005, U.S. Department of State Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Dr. Jendayi Frazer met with Muslim leaders on the Zanzibar island of Pemba. This was the first visit in memory of an assistant secretary-level U.S. official to this remote, predominantly Muslim island. The round table, organized in coordination with the Mufti's Office of Zanzibar, brought together eighteen Muslim leaders representing youth groups, NGOs, and mosques to discuss issues of their choosing with the assistant secretary. Issues discussed included job creation and a request of Muslim clerics for industries to be established in Pemba, new economic projects and funding for existing projects, help to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria on Zanzibar, and access to education for the majority of Zanzibaris and their children. On the same visit, Assistant Secretary Frazer officially opened the Pemba Museum, which was funded ($23,500) through the State Department's Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation.

On September 28, 2005, the embassy hosted a digital videoconference with senior U.S. government officials for Muslim leaders, primarily from Zanzibar.

In June 2005 the embassy sent two key community leaders to the United States on an International Visitor program entitled "Multiculturalism in U.S. Society," which exposed the participants to issues of religious freedom and tolerance. One participant was an editor for one of the largest Kiswahili daily newspapers, whose readership is predominantly Muslim. The other participant was the secretary general of a large Christian organization that publishes a daily newspaper and has its own radio station.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 21,925 square miles, and its population is estimated officially at 5.2 million. The most recent available statistics, published by the Demographic Research Unit of the University of Lome in 2004, stated that the population was approximately 33 percent traditional animist, 27.8 percent Catholic, 13.7 percent Sunni Muslim, and 9.5 percent Protestant. The remaining 16 percent of the population consisted of various Christian (9.8 percent) and non-Christian groups (1.2 percent), and persons not affiliated with any religious group (4.9 percent). Many converts to the more widespread faiths continued to perform rituals that originated in traditional indigenous religions. The number of atheists in the country was unknown but estimated to be small.

Most Muslims lived in the central and northern regions of the country. Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other Christians lived mostly in the southern regions.

Missionaries were active in the country and represent Assembly of God, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and Muslim groups.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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. For instance, the Government voted in favor of the 2004 UN General Assembly Resolution on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance, which reaffirmed that freedom of religion is an inherent human right. There is no state religion.

The Government recognizes seven Christian and two 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 faiths as state religions: Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. Other religions were required 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.

Applications for registration must be submitted to the Ministry of Interior's Division of Civil Security. A religious organization must submit its statutes, a statement of doctrine, bylaws, the names and addresses of executive board members, the pastor's diploma, a contract, a site map, and a description of its financial situation. The criteria for recognition are the authenticity of the pastor's diploma and, most importantly, the ethical behavior of the group, which must not cause a breach of public order.

The Government rejected the applications of a few religious groups based on activities deemed illegal or immoral. For example, 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.

The Civil Security Division also has enforcement responsibilities when there are problems or complaints associated with a religious organization. For example, the Civil Security Division handles noise complaints made against religious organizations, particularly noise complaints related to religious celebrations at night. The Ministry of Interior sends security forces to address the complaints.

The Government has recognized more than 685 religious groups over the past fifteen years; although it is unknown how many of them still exist. Most new groups are small Protestant and Muslim congregations. The Ministry of Interior issues a receipt that serves as temporary recognition to applicant religious groups and associations and allows them to practice their religion, pending investigations and issuance of written authorization, which usually takes several years.

The Muslim Union of Togo reported that since 1991, sixty-four Islamic groups had registered with the Ministry of Interior and the Muslim Union of Togo, including Islamic development nongovernmental organizations and Islamic radio and television enterprises.

Foreign missionary groups are subject to the same registration requirements as other groups.

Religion classes are not part of the curriculum at public schools. Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic schools are common; however, they do not receive funding from the Government.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Religious organizations must request permission to conduct large nighttime celebrations, particularly those involving loud ceremonies in residential areas or that block off city streets. The requests were granted routinely during the period covered by this report.

Religious groups are generally left alone if they refrain from political activities and human rights issues, unless their opinions support the regime. Radio Maria, a popular station operated by a Catholic priest, has run afoul of the Government several times for airing criticism of the Government. The Government prevented Radio Maria from broadcasting for one month beginning April 25 because it erroneously reported the institution of a citywide curfew in Lome. Apparently in response to Radio Maria's repeated political commentary, the government-controlled media regulatory body, High Authority for Radio-Television and Communication, or HAAC (l'Haute Autorite de l'Audio-Visuel et de la Communication) issued a decree at the end of 2005 banning all political programs on community and religious radio and television stations. HAAC shut down the broadcast of a Radio Maria show featuring live political debate, and commission officials periodically warn the station when its programs stray too close to criticism of the regime.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of different faiths regularly invited one another to their respective ceremonies. Intermarriage between persons of different religions was common.

The Christian Council addressed common issues among Protestant denominations. The council comprises the Assemblies of God, Protestant Methodist, the Baptist Convention, Pentecostal churches, Seventh-day Adventist, Lutheran, and Evangelical Presbyterian denominations. The council continued to debate whether to expand its membership to include other Protestant organizations. Catholics and Protestants frequently collaborated through the Biblical Alliance.

Unlike his predecessor, the Catholic archbishop of Lome continued to refrain from delivering political sermons in praise of President Eyadema. In January 2006 the archbishop presided over a government-sponsored service to honor the country's first president, overthrown by Eyadema. The holiday, falling for the first time after Eyadema's death, marks the date of the coup that began the Eyadema regime. During the service, the archbishop promoted reconciliation and peace, urging both sides to move toward a new chapter.

Since 2002 the Catholic Bishops' Conference has spoken on the need for credible, transparent elections, and it has criticized the Government for amending the constitution and electoral code and manipulating the National Election Commission. On April 17, 2005, just before the presidential election, the interim president met with several religious leaders. Among them was the archbishop of Lome, who said in a press conference after the meeting that he and his colleagues had urged the Government to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process.

The former archbishop of Lome was the chairman of a panel designed to rewrite the country's rocky political history. Following its release in late 2005, the public generally praised the final report, and it survived dissent from progovernment members of the panel.

SECTION IV. U.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 distributed 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 Visitor's Program and continued an English language study scholarship program for eighty underprivileged students, whose main beneficiaries were students of the Muslim faith. The two-year English language program contains regular segments on aspects of life in the United States, including religious tolerance.

UGANDA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government imposed some minor restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, bans imposed by local authorities against nighttime religious meetings for security and noise abatement reasons were still in effect in residential areas of several districts.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some members of the more traditional denominations 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 its population is approximately 26.7 million. Christians constituted approximately 85 percent of the population. Muslims comprised approximately 12 percent of the population. A variety of other religions, including traditional indigenous religions, Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Judaism, were practiced freely and combined represented an estimated 2 percent of the population. Among Christian groups, the Roman Catholic Church had the largest number of followers with 42 percent; the Anglican Church claimed 36 percent. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches were active, and their membership was growing. Muslims were mainly Sunni, although there are Shi'a followers of the Aga Khan among the Asian community. Several branches of Hinduism also were represented among the Asian community. There were few atheists.

In many areas, particularly in rural settings, some religions 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 denominations were active, including the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Church, the Church of Uganda (part of the Anglican Communion), the Church of Christ, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, in practice the Government imposed some minor restrictions.

All new 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. The law governing NGO registration was amended by Parliament on April 7, 2006. The amendments include updating fines imposed on violators and providing the NGO board with discretion over the duration and conditions of the permit. A broad coalition of NGOs pushed for more liberalizing reforms and petitioned the president to reject Parliament's amendment act. The NGO coalition argued that the continued presence of security agencies on the NGO board and the powers to limit the duration of permits provide the executive too much power to control NGO operations.

In practice, most religious organizations were granted permits. Unlike in the previous year, the Government did not refuse registration to any religious groups.

Community-based organizations that operate in only one subcounty were not required to register with the NGO board. Instead, they must register with the district government. Some local governments closed down community churches for failure to register. For example, on March 29, 2006, police in Wakiso District closed Entebbe Holy Fire Ministries Church for failure to register.

Missionary groups faced no restrictions on their activities. Foreign missionary groups, like foreign NGOs, must register with the Government. There were no reports that the Government refused to grant registration to any foreign missionary groups.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the Uganda Revenue Authority had not implemented its decision to tax religious institutions' surplus income that were not put to the common use of their congregations or to the good of society. Religious organizations are required by law to pay taxes on any properties that earn income.

Permits were necessary for the construction of facilities, including those of a religious nature. Religious facilities were also required to meet building safety codes. On April 20, 2006, Kampala City Council sued the Cavalry Temple Church for failing to secure building approval and because its structure built largely of papyrus did not meet the building code.

Private Qur'anic and Christian schools were common. In public schools, religious instruction was optional, and the curriculum covered academic study of world religions rather than instruction in one particular faith. There were also many private schools sponsored by religious groups that offer religious instruction. These schools were open to students of other faiths, but they usually did not offer minority religious instruction.

Prisoners were given the opportunity to pray on days devoted to their faith. Muslim prisoners usually were released from work duties during the month of Ramadan.

Religious holy days celebrated as national holidays include Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that local government took any new actions to restrict operation of religious organizations for reasons of security; however, bans against nighttime prayers in some local communities for noise abatement reasons remained in effect. National government policy did not include restrictions.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports that authorities arrested persons due to their membership in religious groups during the period covered by this report. In 2005, however, 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. The Government refused to register the organization for security reasons. On February 28, 2005, police released the four pastors with a warning. Also, on May 1, 2005, police in Mubende District arrested Prophet Ssali Kilimba Mwaka for conducting an illegal society, practicing witchcraft, and being in possession of articles used in witchcraft; Mwaka was later released on bail. On September 21, 2005, a court acquitted Mwaka on all charges.

In March 2004 armed gunmen at the Evangelical School of Technology in Yumbe District killed an American missionary couple, Donna and Warren Pett, and a Ugandan student, Isaac Juruga. Police initially arrested five persons suspected of participation in the killings. The motive for the killings was unknown but may have been related to theft, local hostility to evangelical activity in a predominantly Muslim area, or a rivalry between two local clans. In 2005 six suspects were charged with murder and imprisoned in Arua District. On February 25, 2006, the six suspects escaped from prison and were suspected by police to have crossed into the Democratic Republic of Congo. Eleven prison warders in charge of the prison were arrested and charged by the Arua Magistrate's Court with negligence. At the end of this reporting period, the warders had been released on bond and were awaiting trial; the suspects remained at large.

There were no new developments in the case of eight Tabliq Muslims arrested in 2004 for attacking an evangelical Christian outreach in Masaka District and for assaulting antiriot police that resulted in one civilian death and several injuries.

The rebel organization Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was responsible for killing tens of thousands of persons in the past twenty years, kidnapping more than 20,000 children, attacking religious leaders and property, and causing more than 1.5 million persons to flee their homes and move to makeshift camps. During the period covered by this report, the Government continued its efforts to stop the LRA insurgency through a combination of military action against the LRA, attempted negotiations for a peace settlement, and provision of amnesty for rebels wishing to surrender.

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

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

During the period covered by this report, several religious alliances, including the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, Religious Efforts for Teso and Karamoja, and the Inter-Religious Program, continued efforts to ease religious tensions and find lasting solutions to civil unrest and the insurgency in the northern part of the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; it is also active in sponsoring efforts to promote dialogue and harmony among religious groups.

During the period covered by this report, the ambassador and other U.S. government and embassy officials met with leaders of various religious institutions, including representatives from the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council; the Church of Uganda; the Roman Catholic Church; the National Fellowship of Born Again Churches of Uganda; the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda; and the Uganda Joint Christian Council.

The U.S. embassy sponsored several events to promote interfaith dialogue, forge interfaith coalitions to support peace building in conflict areas, and allow the Muslim population to voice its opinions on issues of bilateral interest. International visitor grants allowed influential Muslim leaders to travel to the United States, where they shared their experiences with fellow Muslims. The U.S. government worked with and through faith-based organizations to promote peace and reconciliation in conflict areas.

ZAMBIA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 290,586 square miles, and its population is approximately ten million. According to a 2000 census, approximately 87 percent of the population was Christian; 1 percent was Muslim or Hindu; 7 percent adhered to other faiths, including indigenous faiths; and 5 percent did not report their religion.

The majority of indigenous persons were either Roman Catholic or Protestant; however, many Christians held some traditional beliefs as well. In recent years, there has been an upsurge of new Pentecostal churches, commonly known as evangelical churches, which have attracted many young persons into their ranks.

Muslims were concentrated in areas where citizens of Asian origin have settled, primarily along the railroad line from Lusaka to Livingstone, in Chipata, and in other parts of Eastern Province. Many Asian-origin citizens were Muslim, although Hindus constituted a sizable percentage of this group as well. A small minority of indigenous persons was also Muslim.

Foreign missionary groups present included Catholic, Anglican, other mainstream and evangelical churches, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 freedom of thought and religion to all citizens, freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom to manifest and propagate religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance. Statutes provide effective remedies for the violation of religious freedom. These provisions are enforced in a rigorous and nondiscriminatory fashion.

The Oasis Forum—composed of the Law Association of Zambia, the Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) Coordinating Committee, the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia—continued to be active during the period covered by this report. The Government criticized the Oasis Forum over its stance on the constitutional review process and the mode of adoption of a new constitution. In spite of rebukes by government officials of church leaders for taking a stand on political issues, churches continued to freely and vocally criticize the Government, organize activities, and mobilize public opinion.

Although a 1996 amendment to the constitution declared the country a Christian nation, the Government generally respects the right of all faiths to worship freely. In its final report on constitutional reform released on December 29, 2005, the Constitution Review Commission recommended that the constitution retain the declaration that Zambia is a Christian nation, subject to approval by a constituent assembly and national referendum. 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. The Government approves without discrimination all applications for registration from religious groups. There were no reports that the Government rejected any religious groups that attempted to register. To be eligible for registration, groups must have a unique name, possess a constitution consistent with the country's laws, and display compatibility with the peace, welfare, and good order of the country. Unregistered religious groups are not allowed to operate. Violators can face a fine and imprisonment for up to seven years.

Although the Government routinely allows religious groups to register, in March 2006, Foreign Minister Ronnie Shikapwasha stated publicly that the Government would begin the practice of consulting with the Council of Churches in Zambia before it registers church groups. The foreign minister's statement came in the wake of a controversy involving the Universal Church of God, which the Government deregistered in December after Lusaka residents rioted in response to allegations that church members were engaged in satanic practices. In January 2006 the High Court overturned the Government's deregistration order, allowing the Church to continue operations pending judicial review. The Government nevertheless deported the Church's two Brazilian pastors in February, citing security concerns. The Church continues to operate in the country and has petitioned the High Court to find the Government in contempt for violating the order staying proceedings against the church. At the end of the period covered by this report, the High Court had not ruled on the Church's petition.

There were no reports that foreign missionary groups faced any special requirements or restrictions beyond those imposed on other foreigners.

The Government requires religious instruction in public schools. Such instruction is conducted in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions, and students from other faiths are usually excused from religious instruction. Instruction in Islam and other faiths is not available in public schools; however, it is conducted in private schools owned and controlled by those faiths. Parents can also homeschool their children.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

Leaders of various ecumenical movements, such as the Zambia Episcopal Conference, the Christian Council of Zambia, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia, hold regular meetings to promote mutual understanding and interfaith dialogue and to discuss national issues.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Embassy officials met with a wide spectrum of religious representatives to promote interreligious dialogue and collaboration on several issues. The mission supported interdenominational efforts to increase HIV/AIDS awareness. The U.S. government hosted a religious pastor for a three-week International Visitor program on religion and the community. The mission focused on outreach to the Muslim community, meeting with groups of Muslim women, providing Internet training, and hosting interactive discussions between American and Zambian Muslims, including a digital video conference between Zambian Muslim women and a well-known American Muslim woman writer and speaker. Mission staff also visited a Muslim girls orphanage and school to conduct outreach and discuss future programs.

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 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 the majority of religious groups (primarily Christian), 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. An interfaith council, formed in 2004, continued to work towards creating closer ties between different religious groups.

The U.S. government expressed its position on religious freedom through its publication and dissemination of various human rights documents, including the annual reports on International Religious Freedom, the Human Rights Report and various other statements. It continued to condemn the Government's generally poor human rights record and expressed its position on religious freedom publicly.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 150,760 square miles and a population of approximately 12.2 million. It is estimated that between 70 and 80 percent of the population belonged to the mainstream Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist churches; however, over the years a variety of local churches and groups have emerged from these mainstream denominations. Evangelical denominations, primarily Pentecostal churches and apostolic groups, were the fastest growing during the reporting period.

While the country is overwhelmingly Christian, the majority of persons continued to believe, to varying degrees, in traditional indigenous religions as well. For example, individuals may have worshiped in a westernized Christian church but also consulted with traditional healers.

Traditional healers were very common in both rural and urban areas. They are licensed and regulated by the Zimbabwe National African Traditional Healers' Association (ZINATHA), which has approximately 55,000 members. ZINATHA officials estimated that 80 percent of the population consulted traditional healers during the year. Religious leaders also reported an increase in adherence to traditional religion and healers as the economic situation worsened in the country.

Islam accounted for 1 percent of the population and also continued to see growth, particularly in rural areas where Muslim-led humanitarian efforts were often organized. The remainder of the population included practitioners of Greek Orthodoxy, Judaism, and traditional indigenous religions. There were also a small number of Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, and atheists.

While political elites tended to be associated with one of the established Christian churches, there was no correlation between membership in any religious group and political or ethnic affiliation.

Although there were no official statistics on the prevalence of foreign missionaries in the country, Christian and Muslim missionaries from other parts of Africa, Europe, Asia, and the United States were generally known to operate in the country. Most often, these missionaries ran schools, hospitals, and humanitarian aid organizations. As with humanitarian groups in general, some missionaries were considered by the Government as being potentially political and, consequently, viewed with some suspicion. Missions generally operated without government interference, although they occasionally experienced delays in having their work permits issued.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right.

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. Generally, the practice of a particular faith

was not known to confer any advantage or disadvantage in the political arena, the civil service, the military, or the private sector.

Christmas and Easter are national holidays. There were no reports of non-Christians experiencing discrimination when celebrating other religious holidays.

Unlike in previous years, the Government recognized all religious groups and reached out more to religious leaders, including indigenous ones which it had previously excluded. For example, President Mugabe and other government officials met with indigenous religious leaders throughout the reporting period and included these leaders in the planning for a 2006 National Day of Prayer.

The Government also appeared to be more inclusive of indigenous religions, of which it has traditionally been suspicious, and tolerant of supposed 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 April 2006 President Mugabe signed an amendment to the previously criticized Witchcraft Suppression Act (WSA). The amendment, which was to take effect on July 1, 2006, 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 would no longer be considered a witchcraft practice or evidence of illegal activity. The amendment would also criminalize witch hunts, impose criminal penalties for falsely accusing others of witchcraft, and reject killing of a witch as a defense for murder.

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. ZINATHA also stated that the amendment would facilitate the prosecution of unlicensed traditional healers.

The Government does not require religious groups to be registered; however, religious organizations that operate schools or medical facilities were required to register those specific institutions with the appropriate ministry regulating their activities. Religious institutions were allowed to apply for tax-exempt status and duty-free privileges with the Customs Department. These requests were generally granted.

Curricula at public primary and secondary schools are set by the Ministry of Education. In public institutions of higher education, they are set by curriculum boards that usually include Ministry of Education officials. Many public secondary schools also included a religious education course that focuses on Christian religions but also covers other religions and emphasizes the need for religious tolerance. Most public universities included degrees in religious education which primarily focus on Christian doctrine.

The country has a long history of Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist primary and secondary schools. The Government permitted, and did 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 were also found in the major urban areas such as Harare and Bulawayo. Additionally, several private institutions of higher education included religious studies as a core component of the curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government maintained a monopoly on television broadcasting through the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). As in recent years, the Government permitted limited religious radio and television broadcasting on ZBC and advertising in the Government-controlled press by all, rather than selected religious groups. The Government generally followed the recommendations of the Religious Advisory Board, an umbrella group of Christian denominations, on appropriate religious material to broadcast. Although only Christian groups were represented on this board, religious programming, which included statements by religious leaders, radio broadcasts of prayers, and a regular television show about religion, was representative of non-Christian groups and was not exclusive in this regard. The television show "Traditional Voices," for example, included a religious program aimed at Muslims. It was directed by a local Muslim leader, who was invited by the Government to put on the program twice a month.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, church leaders and members who criticized the Government continued to face intimidation, arrest, and detention by government officials. President Mugabe made speeches denouncing church leaders who purportedly "support the opposition" and frequently called on these leaders to avoid political activity. Church leaders who participated in demonstrations or public events criticizing the Government sometimes faced harassment and temporary detention under the Public Order and Security Act. Under this act police notification is required to hold public gatherings.

On June 25, 2006, President Mugabe spoke for the first time at the annual National Day of Prayer ceremonies. The ceremony was reportedly rescheduled twice to allow Mugabe to attend. Buses from the state-owned bus company transported individuals from gathering spots where ruling party supporters often congregated to the ceremonies. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), which has publicly criticized the regime's human rights abuses and organized past National Days of Prayer, cooperated with the Government in planning the event. The ZCC reported that Mugabe was reaching out more to religious groups. The Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, which has also been critical of the Government, also participated in the organization of the 2006 event. In contrast to these collaborations, the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) criticized the Government for taking over the event and other church groups for collaborating. Despite official government support, turnout for the event was poor.

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 groups organizing public prayers. In May 2006, for example, the ZCA planned a prayer procession in the city of Bulawayo to commemorate the anniversary of the Government's 2005 "Operation Restore Order." The group applied for and received police clearance for the march; however, police revoked the clearance days before the march was to take place. The group held the march, as originally scheduled, on May 20 after successfully challenging the police in court. Police directed the marchers down a different, less populated route than the one planned but otherwise did not interfere. There were no reports that police disturbed any of the other commemoration events planned at churches. According to the ZCA, other religious and secular nongovernmental organizations cancelled or postponed their commemorations of Operation Restore Order under "official pressure." In 2004 POSA was also used to detain nine women belonging to WOZA on charges of "praying in public," an act that allegedly violated Section 19 of the act. According to Amnesty International, some of the women were assaulted during their interrogations; all were eventually released in October of that year.

Operation Restore Order mandated the destruction of purportedly illegal structures. During the reporting period, some places of worship and charities run by religious organizations continued to be destroyed. On July 26, 2005, for example, police destroyed a church and a mosque at the high-density settlement of Porta Farm. In late June, news sources also reported that two church buildings belonging to the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (Zaoga) in Chitungwiza were demolished in late June 2005 for the alleged illegal occupation of land. Several church leaders, particularly Zimbabwean Catholic bishops, criticized the Government's actions. There were no updates to any of these or other cases involving the destruction of places of worship covered in the previous reporting period.

The Government also limited religious groups' activities when it attempted to block efforts by religious and humanitarian organizations that provided relief to the victims of Operation Restore Order. In July 2005, for example, police raided churches in Bulawayo and forcibly removed displaced persons who were taking shelter at the churches. On July 20 of that same year, police detained three clergymen when they went to a police station to inquire about the forced removals. Police arrested a fourth clergyman the same day while he was filming forced removals. Police released all four men without charges the next day. One of the clergymen, Reverend Ray Motsi, claimed that the arrests had been retribution against the churches for assisting victims. The Zimbabwean National Pastor's Conference (ZNPC) released a statement three days later criticizing the Government's actions during the operations and harassment of church groups attempting to provide humanitarian assistance to the victims.

During the period covered by this report, there were no further developments in the cases involving members of Women of Zimbabwe Arise! 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. Rev. Noel Scott, who went to

trial in November 2004 for holding a street prayer in 2002, was no longer in detention. The magistrate responsible for the case failed to issue a judgment scheduled for January 2006, and further action appeared unlikely.

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

The generally amicable relations among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, although divisions between mainstream Christian religions and practitioners of traditional religions continued. Unlike in previous years, there were no reported cases of discrimination against Muslims in private work places, although embassy contacts in 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.

The interfaith council formed in 2004 continued to work towards bringing together practitioners of various faiths and establishing points of collaboration.

At least five umbrella religious organizations continued to operate during the reporting period. These groups included: The ZCC, the Heads of Denominations, an association of Christian denominations created to enable 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.

The ZCC served as the umbrella organization of all Protestant ecumenical Christian missionary churches, except for evangelical organizations. A total of seventy-two evangelical churches applied for membership to the Council during the previous reporting period; however, the ZCC turned down all the applications because the applicant churches allow polygamy.

While practitioners of traditional indigenous religions experienced improved relations with the Government, there were continuing reports of tensions between these groups and mainstream Christian churches. Some indigenous churches' acceptance of polygamy and avoidance of modern medicine were common sources of these tensions. In addition, some Christian church leaders' opposition to the previously mentioned WSA amendment also strained relations between the two communities. Leaders discussed these issues productively in meetings of the interfaith council and suggested possible areas of cooperation, such as HIV/AIDS; notably; however, the head of the Apostolic church renounced polygamy—a practice it previously considered to be legitimate.

Reports of possible ritual killings and mutilations continued to be cited by newspapers and women and children's rights groups throughout the period covered by this report. Police usually investigated these killings; however, limited resources prevented police from conducting many investigations or identifying perpetrators.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. government had regular dialogue with and supported civil society organizations that advocated and monitored respect for human rights, including freedom of religion.

In support of religious freedom, the U.S. embassy widely disseminated relevant reports on religious rights, and U.S. government officials privately and publicly emphasized concern regarding intimidation and harassment of religious officials who criticized the Government. The embassy supported efforts by religious leaders to highlight the Government's human rights abuses and flawed economic policies. It also encouraged these leaders' attempts to initiate and sustain a dialogue with government officials on approaches to improving the political situation.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 2.9 million square miles and a population of 20.5 million. According to the 2001 census, 67 percent of citizens considered themselves to be Christian, including 26 percent Roman Catholic and 20 percent Anglican. Buddhists constituted 1.9 percent of the population, Muslims 1.5 percent, Hindus 0.5 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 2001 census, 5,244 persons or less than 0.03 percent of respondents reported practicing aboriginal traditional religions, down from 7,359 in 1996. The 1996 census reported that almost 72 percent of Aborigines practiced some form of Christianity, and 16 percent listed no religion. The 2001 census contained no comparable updated data.

During the first census, in 1911, 96 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian. Since the 1950s traditional Christian denominations have seen their total number and proportion of affiliates stagnate or decrease significantly, although from 1996 to 2001 the total number of Christians increased 1.5 percent. Over the past decade, increased immigration from Southeast Asia and the Middle East considerably expanded the numbers of citizens who identified themselves as Buddhists and Muslims, and it expanded the ethnic diversity of existing Christian denominations. Between 1996 and 2001, the number of Buddhists increased from 199,812 to 357,813 persons, Muslims from 200,885 to 281,578, Jews from 79,800 to 84,000, and Hindus from 67,300 to 95,500. In 2001 approximately 15 percent of citizens considered themselves to have no religion, a 1.5 percent decrease from 1996. According to a 2002 survey, 23 percent of adults participated in church or religious activities during the three months prior to these interviews. A 2001 report listed 810 foreign Protestant, Anglican, and Independent Christian missionaries to 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. However, a 1998 review by the independent federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) found that federal laws did not adequately meet the country's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and recommended that the Government enact a federal religious freedom act. In 2002 the Government stated that it would not do so.

During the period covered by this report, the HREOC did not report to Parliament on any religious discrimination cases involving a government agency. Under the provisions of the Federal Racial Discrimination Act, the HREOC mediates a complaint when a plaintiff's religious affiliation is considered tantamount to membership in an ethnic group. During the twelve-month period ending June 30, 2005, the commission received sixteen employment-related complaints alleging discrimination on religious grounds. Another federal law, the Workplace Relations Act, prohibits termination of employment on the basis of religion.

The State of Tasmania is the only state or territory whose constitution specifically provides citizens with the right to profess and practice their religion. However, seven of the eight states and territories have laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of a person's religion or ethno-religious background. South Australia is the only jurisdiction that does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion. All jurisdictions, apart from South Australia, have established independent agencies to mediate allegations of religious discrimination.

Minority 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. For instance, in November 2004 more than 200 Muslims gathered to celebrate the opening of a western Sydney Islamic prayer center, which had been subject to a construction delay because the local council in 2003 had refused the developers a planning permit, reportedly deeming the center to be incompatible with local community beliefs.

In June 2005 the Victoria Civil and Administrative Tribunal ordered two Christian pastors to make a public apology, via newspaper statements, for comments that the court held had vilified Muslims. It was estimated that the newspaper advertisements would cost $52,900 (A$68,690). 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; the appeal was scheduled to be heard on August 21–22, 2006. 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 August 2005 a coalition of international religious freedom organizations wrote to the attorney general alleging that the act violates Article 18 of the ICCPR, which protects religious speech.

Religious groups are not required to register.

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.

The Government has put in place extensive programs to promote public acceptance of diversity and cultural pluralism, as well as funding for a variety of interfaith forums, including sponsorship of the International Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Several nongovernmental organizations promoted tolerance

and better understanding among religions in the country, both indigenous and non-indigenous. 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 2003, in response to an increase in anti-Islamic sentiment, the HREOC undertook a project involving national consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim citizens. As part of the consultations, the commission considered whether Muslim citizens shared an ethnic origin or race, as well as a religion, which would entitle them to comprehensive protection under the Federal Race Discrimination Act. The commission's report, made public in June 2004, contained no findings on the racial status of Arab and Muslim citizens. However, it called on the Government to extend the coverage of antidiscrimination legislation to encompass religion.

In the 12 month period ending September 30, 2005, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry recorded 332 anti-Semitic incidents, which ranged from physical violence and property damage (11 reports) to harassment and offensive written and electronic media messages, compared to a total of 425 incidents in 2004. Although this was a significant decrease, it was still higher than the annual average of 301 incidents since reports were first compiled in 1989. (Such incidents increased from September 1990 to a high in September 2002; since then, they have decreased each year.)

In January 2005 the leader of the neo-Nazi Australian Nationalist Movement pleaded not guilty to charges of criminal damage and conspiracy to cause arson in connection with incidents in 2004 in which several Asian-owned businesses and a synagogue in Perth were firebombed or sprayed with racist graffiti. His trial, scheduled for March 2006, was cancelled when he skipped bail in February 2006, and the case was adjourned. He was rearrested in April 2006. At a status conference on June 20, 2006, his trial was scheduled for February 5, 2007.

On December 11, 2005, there was a riot in the Sydney suburb of Cronulla, sparked by suspicions that a group of Lebanese-Australian youths had assaulted two lifeguards. Demonstrators against the assault displayed anti-Arab and anti-Muslim slogans. When the gathering turned violent, bystanders perceived to be of Middle Eastern origin or Muslim were attacked. At least thirty persons were injured in the fighting. The following day, retaliatory vandalism and other assaults were reported around Sydney.

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.

BRUNEI

The constitution states, "The religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Muslim religion according to the Shafeite sect of that religion: Provided that all other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony by the person professing them in any part of Brunei Darussalam." However, the Government imposed many restrictions on non-Shafeite and non-Islamic religious practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Practitioners of non-Muslim faiths are not allowed to proselytize. Christian schools are required under the Education Order of 2003 to give Islamic instruction to Muslim students, and all post-secondary students are required to attend courses on the national religious 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 International Conference on Faith and Service, in Manila in March 2006, and to the East Asian Religious Leaders Forum held in Jakarta in February 2006 with officials from various religions.

The country's various religious groups coexisted peacefully. The law discouraged Muslims from learning about other faiths and forbid persons of other faiths from proselytizing. At the same time, Islamic authorities organize a range of activities to explain and propagate Islam, and they also offer financial incentives, housing, and new mosques for converts to Islam.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. embassy supported religious freedom through a number of programs, including 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 Bruneian citizens, there were 162,542 Muslims; 8543 Buddhists; 3703 Christians; 124 Hindus; 20 Atheists; 19 Taoists; and 18 Sikhs; as well as 69 individuals of other faiths and 10,392 who did not state their faith. Among permanent residents, according to the same statistics, there were 12,941 Muslims; 8801 Buddhists; 3204 Christians; 91 Hindus; 18 Taoists; 15 Sikhs; 10 Atheists; 70 of other faiths and 7,615 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 were 107 mosques and prayer halls, 7 Christian churches, several Chinese temples, and 2 Hindu temples in the country.

Proselytizing by faiths other than the officially sanctioned branch of Islam is not permitted. There were no missionaries working in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution states, "The religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Muslim religion according to the Shafeite sect of that religion: Provided that all other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony by the person professing them in any part of Brunei Darussalam." However, the Government imposes many restrictions on non-Islamic religions and non-Shafeite practitioners.

The Government describes the country as a Malay Islamic monarchy, 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.

In January 2005 the Government introduced legislation under the Societies Order that replaced the Societies Act. As did the act, the order compels all organizations, including religious groups not specifically mentioned in the constitution to register. The order also requires organizations to name all members. An organization that fails to register can face charges of unlawful assembly and be fined. Individuals who participate in or influence others to join unregistered organizations can be fined, arrested, and imprisoned. Approval to register is at the discretion of the Registrar of Societies or Commissioner of Police and may be refused for any reason.

The Government continued to use zoning laws that prohibit the use of private homes as places of worship. While the country had several Chinese temples, only the temple in the capital was registered officially. The other temples did not face charges for failing to register, but they were not allowed to organize functions and celebrations.

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 fifteenth century. MIB principles have been adopted as the basis for government, and all meetings and ceremonies commence with a Muslim prayer. At citizenship ceremonies, non-Muslims must wear national dress, which includes Muslim head coverings for men and women.

Despite constitutional provisions providing for the full and unconstrained exercise of religious freedom, the Government restricted the practice of non-Muslim religions by prohibiting proselytizing of Muslims. The Government has also in previous years occasionally denied entry to foreign clergy or particular priests, bishops, or ministers; banned the importation of religious teaching materials or scriptures such as the Bible; and refused permission to establish, expand, repair, or build churches, temples, or shrines. The Government allows only the practice of the official Shafeite school of Islam. It has banned several other religious groups that it considers deviant, including the radical Islamic Al-Arqam movement and the Baha'i Faith; however, the Government did not ban any new groups during the period covered by this report. Citizens deemed to have been influenced by the teachings of such groups (usually students returning from overseas study) have been "shown the error of their ways" in study seminars organized by mainstream Islamic religious leaders. The Government readily investigated and took 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 May 2005 during a sermon at the national mosque.

A 1964 fatwa issued by the State Mufti strongly discourages Muslims from assisting non-Muslim organizations in perpetuating their faiths, and it reportedly has been used by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to influence other government authorities either to deny non-Muslim religious organizations permission for a range of religious and administration activities or to fail to respond to applications from these groups. Nonetheless, Christian churches and their associated schools have been allowed for safety reasons, to repair, expand, and renovate buildings on their sites and to carry out minor building works. In 2006 the Government approved a request from Anglican St. Andrews Church to undertake a major refurbishment of its buildings, a significant development.

The sole official Chinese temple must obtain permission for seasonal religious events and could not organize processions outside the bounds of its half-acre site. However, in 2005 the Government permitted Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations outside the grounds of the Chinese temple. The Government does not impose any restriction for the Chinese temple to celebrate seasonal religious events provided that the committee obtains permission from relevant authorities. Christian organizations are subjected to the same restrictions on processions.

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.

The Government requires residents to carry an identity card that states the bearer's religion. The Government also asks visitors to identify their religion on their landing cards, although many people do not comply and have not been challenged.

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, 389 "khalwat" cases were reported during the period of July 2005 to April 2006. 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 four months for repeated offenses of khalwat. Under Bruneian 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 nonhalal meats. They also monitored restaurants and supermarkets to ensure conformity with halal practice. Restaurants and service employees that served a Muslim in daylight hours during the fasting month were subjected to fines.

The Ministry of Education requires courses on Islam and the MIB in all schools. Most school textbooks were illustrated to promote Islam as the norm, with all women and girls 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. Private mission schools are required to give instruction about Islam to Muslim students and are not allowed to give Christian instruction, although at one such school Christian students have been allowed to attend church during those periods when Muslim students receive instruction about Islam. The ministry requires that all students learn the Jawi (Arabic script in Malay language). The International School of Brunei, the Jerudong International School, and the Panaga School are the only schools exempt from this regulation; however, these private institutions are required to teach MIB. In January 2004, under its integrated education plan to combine religious and academic education, the ministry introduced a pilot program in thirty-eight government primary schools that requires the compulsory study of Arabic by all students; this plan was abolished in January 2006. In December 2005 the Institute of Tahfiz al-Quran, previously run by His Majesty the Sultan's Foundation, was handed over to the Ministry of Religious Affairs where the institute's education, curriculum and courses would come under the ministry's jurisdiction.

The Government did not prohibit or restrict parents from giving religious instruction to children in their own homes.

Religious authorities encouraged Muslim women to wear the tudong, a traditional head covering, and many women did so. In government schools and at higher institutes of learning, Muslim and non-Muslim female students must wear Muslim attire, including a head covering as a part of their "uniform." Muslim male students are expected to wear the songkok (hat). There also were reports that non-Muslim women teachers at public schools are sometimes pressured by government officials or colleagues to wear Muslim attire. In March 2006 a Government-approved Friday sermon called for women to cease playing soccer. According to the sermon, "it is a grievous sin for women to behave like men on the playing field. They should not

resemble males in terms of their garb, conversation or action." The Government took no action along the line of this Friday sermon, and women continued to play soccer.

In accordance with the Government's interpretation of Qur'anic precepts, women are denied equal status with men in a number of important areas such as divorce, inheritance, and custody of children. 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. If the marriages took place, these women faced intense official pressure not to return to their former religions or faced extraordinary delays in obtaining permission to do so. There also were known cases of divorced Muslim converts who, because of official and societal pressure, remained Muslim although they preferred to revert to their former faiths.

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. Non-Muslims who proselytized have in the past been arrested or detained and sometimes held without charges for extended periods of time; however, no such arrests or detentions occurred during the period covered by this report. There have been 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.

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. However, it is an accepted practice for the children of parents converting to Islam to be converted to Islam as well. There were reports in the past of teenage children who refused such conversion despite family and official pressure.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In February 2006 the sultan attended a Chinese New Year's celebration sponsored by the Chinese community in. The Government sponsored a delegation to the International Conference on Faith and Service held in Manila in March 2006. This concession to interfaith dialogue was not reported on state-run television. The local press reported on officials attending the East Asian Religious Leaders Forum held in Jakarta in February 2006, with officials from various religions. A former ambassador represented the Government at the funeral of Pope John Paul II, and the then deputy minister of foreign affairs signed a condolence book at the Brunei Catholic diocese. In June 2005 Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, traveled to the country where he met with senior Government officials.

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 religious authority also builds mosques and prayer halls for converts in these areas but will not allow the construction of churches or other non-Muslim houses of worship.

The country's national philosophy, the MIB concept, discourages open-mindedness to religions other than Islam, and there are no programs to promote understanding of other religions. The country's indigenous people generally convert either to Islam or Christianity but rarely to Buddhism. Consequently, Muslim officials view Christianity as the main rival to Islam.

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 2005 the embassy selected a Fulbright grant recipient to undertake a graduate program in Islamic Studies and Comparative Religions in the United States. 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 have 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.

BURMA

Highly repressive, authoritarian military regimes have ruled the country since 1962. Constitutional support for religious freedom has not existed since 1988 after the armed forces brutally suppressed massive prodemocracy demonstrations and abrogated the constitution. In 1990 prodemocracy 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 religions to worship as they choose; however, the Government imposes restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abuses the right to freedom of religion.

There was no change in the limited respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. 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 religions from constructing new places of worship. The Government also actively promoted Theravada Buddhism over other religions, particularly among members of minority ethnic groups. Christian and Islamic groups continued to have trouble obtaining permission to repair existing places of worship or build new ones in most regions. Anti-Muslim violence continued, as did the close monitoring of Muslims activities. Restrictions on worship of other non-Buddhist minority groups also continued throughout the country. There were no reports of forced conversions of non-Buddhists. Adherence or conversion to Buddhism, however, is generally a prerequisite for promotion to senior government and military ranks.

During the period covered by this report there were persistent social tensions 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, and scholars, diplomats of other governments, and international business and media representatives. Embassy representatives offered support to local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious leaders, and acted as a conduit for information 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 approximately 261,970 square miles and a population of more than 54 million. The majority followed 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, including novices, numbered more than 400 thousand and depended on the laity for their material needs, including clothing and daily donations of food. The country had a much smaller number of Buddhist nuns. Christian groups (Catholics, Baptists, Anglicans, and an array of other Protestant denominations), Muslims (mostly Sunni), Hindus, and practitioners of traditional Chinese and indigenous religions represented the principal minority faiths. According to official statistics, almost 90 percent of the population practiced Buddhism, 6 percent practiced Christianity, and 4 percent practiced Islam. These statistics almost certainly underestimated the non-Buddhist proportion of the population, which could be as high as 30 percent. Muslim leaders estimated that approximately 20 percent of the popu-

lation was Muslim. A tiny Jewish community in Rangoon had a synagogue but no resident rabbi to conduct services.

The country was ethnically diverse, with some correlation between ethnicity and religion. Theravada Buddhism was 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 was 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 continued to practice traditional indigenous religions. Protestant groups reported recent rapid growth among animist communities in Chin State. Christianity was also practiced widely among the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups of the southern and eastern regions, although many Karen and Karenni were Buddhist. In addition, some ethnic Indians were Christian. Hinduism was practiced chiefly by Burmese of Indian origin, who were concentrated in major cities and in the south-central region. Islam was practiced widely in Rakhine State, where it was the dominant religion of the Rohingya minority, and in Rangoon, Ayeyarwady, and Mandalay divisions. Some Burmans, Indians, and ethnic Bengalis also practiced Islam. Chinese ethnic minorities generally practiced traditional Chinese religions. Traditional indigenous religions were practiced widely among smaller ethnic groups in the highland regions. Practices drawn from those indigenous religions persisted 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 religions that registered with the authorities generally enjoyed the right to worship as they chose; however, the Government imposed restrictions on certain religious activities and frequently abused 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 has negotiated cease-fire agreements with most armed ethnic groups since 1989, active Shan, Karen, and Karenni insurgencies continued during the period covered by this report. 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.

Since independence, successive governments, civilian and military, have supported and associated themselves conspicuously with Buddhism. The country has no official state religion. In 1961, the Government's push to make Buddhism the state religion failed due to national protests by religious minorities. However, in practice the Government continued 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 were generally contingent on the candidates being followers of Buddhism. The Ministry of Religious Affairs included the powerful Department for the Promotion and Propagation of Sasana (Buddhist teaching).

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.

Buddhist doctrine remained part of the state-mandated curriculum in all government-run elementary schools. Students could 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 act, while at some schools non-Buddhists are forced to recite the prayer. The Government continued to fund two state Sangha universities in Rangoon and Mandalay to train Buddhist monks under the control of the state-sponsored State Monk Coordination Committee ("Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee" or SMNC). The Government also funded one university intended to teach noncitizens about Theravada Buddhism.

Official public holidays include 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 religions and maintained multi-religion monuments in Rangoon and other major cities.

In November 2005, the minister of religious affairs called a meeting of leaders of the four main religions in the country. The minister used the meeting to denounce the 2005 State Department International Religious Freedom Report and requested each leader write a letter stating that their religious communities may practice their faith freely in the country, which the ministry would display on its official website. During a discussion that followed, the representative of the Islamic Religious Affairs Council (IRAC) said that while there had been progress on some religious issues, 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, which monks indirectly elect. Violations of this law are punishable by immediate public defrocking, and often by criminal penalties.

Authorities defrocked and arrested a group of twenty-six monks in 2003 and sentenced them in 2004 to jail terms of seven years (eighteen years for the leader) for refusing to accept government donations of robes and other items. The authorities released these monks from prison on July 6, 2005. Monks serving sentences of life in prison reportedly included the Venerable U Thondara of Myingyan (arrested during the 1988 antigovernment demonstrations). The exile-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) estimated that there were eighty-four monks in prison for various charges. The AAPP estimate could not be verified. The number of non-Buddhists in prison for their religious beliefs was unknown.

In 2004, the regime hosted a three-day World Buddhist Summit, despite international criticism and the last-minute withdrawal of the summit's original Japanese sponsors due to political and security concerns following the October 2004 ousting of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt. The summit drew approximately 1,600 attendees from around the world (although most were from within the country). The prime ministers of Thailand and Laos also attended.

State-controlled news media frequently depicted or described government officials paying homage to Buddhist monks making donations at pagodas throughout the country, officiating at ceremonies to open, improve, restore, or maintain pagodas, and organizing ostensibly voluntary "people's donations" of money, food, and uncompensated labor to build or refurbish Buddhist religious shrines throughout the country. State-owned newspapers routinely featured front-page banner slogans quoting from Buddhist scriptures. The Government has published books of Buddhist religious instruction. The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a government-sponsored mass organization in which participation often is compulsory, organized courses in Buddhist culture attended by millions of persons, according to state-owned media reports. It was not possible to verify this claim independently.

The Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana handles the Government's relations with Buddhist monks and Buddhist schools. The Government-funded International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University (ITBMU) in Rangoon, which opened in 1998, has as its stated purpose "to share the country's knowledge of Buddhism with the people of the world." The main language of instruction is English. There are reports that the ITBMU, while in principle open to the public, accepted only candidates who were approved by government authorities or recommended by a senior, progovernment abbot.

The Government infiltrated or monitored the meetings and activities of virtually all organizations, including religious organizations. Religious activities and organizations of all faiths also were subject to broad government restrictions on freedom of expression and association. The Government subjected all media, including religious publications, and on occasion sermons, to control and censorship.

Authorities 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, after repeatedly postponing the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Islamic Religious Affairs Council and its sixteenth Islam Religious Assembly in Myitkyina, Kachin State, local authorities agreed to allow the

convocation from May 30 to 31. On May 29, the authorities asked IRAC leaders to postpone the meeting again, but later the Kachin PDC chairman agreed to allow the nearly 400 delegates who had gathered in Myitkyina after traveling from all over the country to meet for just one and a half hours on May 31. The Muslim delegates found this unacceptable and returned home without convening. In April 2006, Mandalay authorities refused permission for area churches to hold a joint Easter program. When permission was granted to hold a general meeting, Christian leaders reported that authorities often required them to submit details in advance of the meeting, including the name of the pianist and what songs they would play. Islamic groups reported that authorities authorized only remote sites for their annual Eid al-Adha sacrifices within Rangoon. Muslims had to travel long distances to participate. Muslims also reported that the Eid al-Adha ceremonies were restricted to three hours in length. Some Buddhists complained that the animal sacrifices during Islamic religious festivals offended their sensitivities. In 2004, the Government revoked permission at the last moment for the Methodist Church of Lower Burma to hold its one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary gala event.

In 1995, the Government prohibited any opposition political party member from being ordained as a monk or religious leader. Although this measure remained in effect, it was not strictly enforced.

The Government continued to discriminate against members of minority religions, restricting their educational, proselytizing, and church-building activities.

In June 2005, authorities forced a Muslim private tutor in Rangoon to close down his school. Although he was teaching only the public school curriculum, authorities accused him of trying to convert children to Islam because he was offering free courses.

In June 2005, authorities in Shwepyitha Township, Rangoon Division, arrested eight Muslims, including the imam of the community, and charged them with holding group prayers at the imam's house. Authorities also arrested a Muslim cleric in South Dagon Township, Rangoon Division, for holding private Qur'an courses for Muslim children at his house.

In October 2005, a proregime Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) group from Kawkareik District, Karen State, reportedly detained three members of the local IRAC, including the chairman, and kept them in an underground cell. A senior DKBA officer intervened and gained their release after three days. In December 2005, authorities at Three Pagoda Township in the same district reportedly ordered Muslim leaders to stop holding prayers at the local worship hall they had used for many years, located on land owned by the IRAC.

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.

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 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.

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. During the period of this report, authorities in Mandalay arrested three pastors for building new churches and charged them with land law violations, not for violating any religious regulations. Muslims reported that

they essentially were banned from constructing new mosques anywhere in the country, and they had great difficulty obtaining permission to repair or expand their existing structures. Some authorities reportedly destroyed informal houses of worship or unauthorized religious construction they discovered. Buddhist groups have not experienced similar difficulties in obtaining permission to build new pagodas, monasteries, or community religious halls.

Some Christians in Chin State claimed that authorities have not authorized the construction of any new churches since 1997. In some parts of the state, however, recently built churches are evident. In March 2006, Lt. Col. Hla Maw Oo, director of the Border Trade Department, ordered Kachin Baptists to remove a church from its current location in Mong Yu in northeastern Shan State by April 20 to make way for an economic development zone along the Chinese border. The official reportedly offered $7,000 (8.7 million kyats) compensation for the church that Christian businessmen built for $12,070 (15 million kyats) in 2002. The official threatened to involve the military if the members did not comply. This case was still pending at the end of the reporting period. In Chin State, authorities jailed three persons for constructing new churches. In Rangoon, Mandalay, and elsewhere, authorities allowed construction of new community centers by various Christian groups if the groups agreed not to hold services there or erect any Christian signs.

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 creates a tenuous legal situation. When local authorities or conditions have changed, informal approvals for construction have been rescinded abruptly and construction halted. In some cases, authorities demolished existing church buildings.

Since the 1960s, Christian and Islamic groups have had difficulty importing religious literature into the country. All publications, religious and secular, remained subjected to control and censorship. It was illegal to import translations of the Bible in indigenous languages. Officials have occasionally allowed local printing or photocopying of limited copies of other religious material (with the notation that they were for internal use only) in indigenous languages without prior approval by government censors.

During the period covered by this report, individuals continued to smuggle Bibles and Qur'ans into the country in small quantities. Some were intercepted at the border and confiscated, frequently ending up for sale on the black market.

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 over one hundred 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.

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 2005, authorities allowed only 300 Muslims to participate officially in the Hajj. Consequently, as many as 3 thousand Muslims made their own arrangements, and many more from Rakhine State reportedly crossed over to Bangladesh to obtain Bangladeshi passports in order to participate in the Hajj. During the period covered by this report, immigration and passport office officials continued to use the occasion of the Hajj to extort bribes from would-be travelers. As a result, the cost to official pilgrims was reportedly more expensive than for pilgrims who made their own private arrangements.

Religious affiliation is indicated on government-issued identification cards that citizens and permanent residents of the country are required to carry at all times.

Having the term "Muslim" on the cards often led to harassment by police or immigration authorities. Citizens were also required to indicate their religion on official application forms, such as passports.

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 very few Christians reportedly achieved the rank of lieutenant colonel. The Central Executive Committee of the largest opposition group—the National League for Democracy—included no non-Buddhists, although individual members from most religions 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 required to convert. In one instance in 2005, superiors informed a Buddhist officer that his Christian wife must convert to Buddhism or else he would have to resign from the army.

Religious discrimination also occurred in education and cultural activities. In 2005, a high school student named Alexander reached the division level in an intramural sports competition. Mandalay division authorities assumed by his name that he was a Christian and disqualified him. In addition, when a Christian tried to hold a birthday celebration in a Mandalay hotel in 2005, local authorities banned it, claiming it was a religious event that should be held in a church.

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 Rohingyans 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. 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 estimates that only 50 percent of the approximately 700 thousand 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 1988, the Government permitted only three marriages per year per village in the primarily Rohingya townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung in northern Rakhine State, and required the approval of the Regional Military Commander. In 2005, the Government extended this edict to Kyauk Pyu and Ramree Townships in central Rakhine State. Following the ouster of Prime Minister Khin Nyunt in October 2004 and the demise of his military intelligence apparatus, marriage restrictions were temporarily lifted but were reportedly reinstated in 2005. After a backlog accumulated of nearly 3 thousand unapproved marriage applications, the Regional Military Commander reportedly agreed to allow some Rohingya Muslims who possessed TRCs to marry.

Muslims in the country had 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. 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.

Muslims across the country, as well as some other ethnic minority groups such as Chinese and Indians, were required to obtain advance permission from the township authorities whenever they wished to leave their hometowns. Authorities generally do not grant permission to Rohingya or Muslim Arakanese to travel from their hometowns for any purpose. However, permission sometimes can be obtained through bribery. Non-Arakanese Muslims are given more freedom to travel; however, they must also seek permission, which is usually granted after a bribe is paid. Muslims residing in Rangoon can visit beach resort areas in Ngapali, Rakhine State, but cannot return to Rangoon without the signature of the Regional Military Commander. Those with money are able to bribe local officials to return. Muslims residing outside of Rakhine State often are barred from return travel to their homes if they visit other parts of Rakhine State.

The Government reserves secondary education for citizens only. Rohingyas do not have access to state-run schools beyond primary education and are 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.

Many of the approximately 21,000 Rohingya Muslims remaining in refugee camps in Bangladesh refused to return because they fear human rights abuses, including religious persecution.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Military forces have killed religious figures on some occasions. However, during the period covered by this report, there were no reports of such killings. A Karen source reported that Burmese soldiers allowed a Christian pastor near Thandaung, Karen State, to hold a religious ceremony in his village on condition that there was no involvement by the KNU. When fighting broke out between KNU forces and the Burmese Army near the pastor's village, the Burmese soldiers arrested him and released him only after he paid $400 (500,000 kyats).

Local civilian and military authorities continued to take actions against Christian groups: Arresting clergy, closing home churches, and prohibiting religious services. During the period covered by this report, authorities in the Rangoon area closed several house churches because they did not have proper authorization to hold religious meetings. Other Rangoon home churches remained operational only after paying bribes to local officials. At the same time, the authorities made it difficult, although not impossible, to obtain approval for the construction of "authorized" churches. In September 2005, officials in Kyauktada Township, Rangoon, ordered the Full Gospel Assembly church to cease its worship services, as it was located in a residential building. The church had been operating from that location for many years and was listed in the 1999 Rangoon Church Directory.

In early 2005, local authorities in the Chin State capital of Haka notified Baptist leaders that they would be forced to relocate an active, historic cemetery from church property to a remote location outside of town. Religious leaders reported that authorities continued to forcefully relocate cemeteries in many parts of the country.

In September 2005, local authorities of Pabedan Township, Rangoon, ordered Grace Baptist Church and Theology Seminary to close or face confiscation of their land. The church and seminary continued to operate throughout the period of this report. Evangelists in South Dagon and Hlaing Thayar townships near Rangoon were accused of proselytizing and were threatened in 2003 with arrest if they opened house churches and kindergartens.

In November 2005, authorities in Insein Township, Rangoon, pressured evangelical Christians of the twenty-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. In February 2006, Insein Township authorities ordered a Chin evangelist to stop holding worship services in his house church in Aung San ward.

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 which Rangoon authorities closed in early 2006, banning members from worshipping there. Police charged him with traveling without an identity card.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of authorities destroying mosques or of Muslims constructing new mosques. 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. In 2004, local authorities confiscated a Muslim cemetery in Myeik Township, Tanintharyi Division, and closed the adjacent mosque. Three Muslims were reportedly imprisoned for a month for violating this closure order. In 2004, authorities in three suburbs of Rangoon ordered the closure of informal "religious community houses" used by local Muslims in lieu of mosques (which have not been built in these townships). After Muslim leaders in Rangoon complained, community houses in two of the three suburbs were allowed to reopen.

In August 2005, authorities in Sittwe, Rakhine State, ordered an Islamic madrassah to close. The school management complied with the order and sent all the students home.

Authorities have attempted to prevent Chin Christians from practicing their religion. In January 2005, the military commander in Matupi Township, Chin State, ordered the destruction of a thirty-foot cross raised on a hillside with government permission in 1999. Reportedly, a more senior military official subsequently told

local church authorities that they could get permission to reconstruct the cross. However, the local pastors have thus far refused to ask for such authorization. In the past, these crosses often have been replaced with pagodas, sometimes built with forced labor.

In 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 northern Rakhine State, authorities frequently forced Rohingyas to help construct Buddhist shrines, even though Buddhists there account for approximately 2 percent of the population.

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. In January 2006, Muslim Rohingyas from at least ten surrounding villages claimed the military forced them to carry building supplies for three model villages at Padauk Myin, Mala Myin and Thaza Myin in Rathidaung Township. Certain townships in the Rakhine State, such as Thandwe, Gwa, and Taung-gut, were declared "Muslim-free zones" by government decree in 1983. There were still original-resident Muslims living in Thandwe, but newcomers who are Muslim are not allowed to buy property or reside in the township. Muslims were no longer are permitted to live in Gwa and Taung-gut.

In February 2006, violent clashes broke out between Muslims and Buddhists in Magway Division. Responding to rumors that Muslim men had raped a Burman woman near Sinbyukyun town, 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 to prevent the violence from spreading further. Reliable sources said the authorities arrested seventeen people in Sinbyukyun and another fifty-five persons in Chauk, mostly Muslims. Unofficial sources claimed that three people died and another ten were injured in the riots. Three mosques in Yenangyaung, Chauk, and Saku were reportedly destroyed in the violence. Authorities sealed off the mosques and did not permit Muslims to rebuild them by the end of the period of this report, 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 recent attacks follow earlier communal violence in Kyauk Pyu, Arakan State, in January 2005. During several days of violence, two Muslims were killed and one Buddhist monk was severely injured. Some Islamic groups blamed the Government for trying to increase tensions between Buddhists and Muslims as part of a "divide and rule" strategy. In 2004, local Buddhist villagers in Kyun Su Township, Tanintharyi Division, attacked and destroyed the properties of fourteen Muslim families. Despite a complaint from Muslim leaders, the Government has taken no action.

In 2003, there were several violent incidents involving Muslims and Buddhists. There were unverified reports that USDA members incited anti-Muslim violence in Ayeyarwady Division. Authorities had not investigated the incidents by the end of the reporting period.

In the aftermath of these 2003 attacks, the authorities paid some compensation to the affected Muslims and gave permission to the Kyaukse Muslims to rebuild the two mosques destroyed in the violence. The reconstruction had not occurred because most Muslims had not returned to their previous neighborhoods. In addition, the Government arrested and defrocked forty-four monks and twenty-six other Buddhists suspected of participation in the Kyaukse and Rangoon violence. There were unverified reports that one senior monk received a death sentence; it was not known what sentences the other monks received. These measures caused some tension between the Government and the usually favored Buddhist monkhood, leading to some localized demonstrations inside Rangoon monasteries. Seventy Muslims were arrested and thirty-one Kyaukse Muslims were sentenced in December 2003 (one received the death penalty) for their involvement in the violence, including the alleged murder of a senior Buddhist monk. Muslim leaders called the trials a mockery of justice, but they did not address the veracity of the charges.

There were no known arrests of Buddhist monks during the period covered by this report. A Buddhist nun, Daw Thissawarddy, got into a dispute with the SMNC when she tried to use the honorific title "bikku" for nuns. Authorities detained her in May 2005, but reportedly released her when she agreed to exile in a foreign coun-

try. In 2003, troops reportedly fired on monks protesting the arrest of a local abbot and killed two of them.

Muslim leaders reported that military intelligence officials arrested several Muslim religious teachers in Maungdaw Township, Rakhine State, in 2004 following a fatwa issued against individuals who had allegedly raped a Muslim girl. One of the teachers reportedly was tortured to death in detention. The others were subsequently released.

There continued to be credible reports from diverse regions of the country that government officials compelled persons, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, especially in rural areas, to contribute money, food, or materials to state-sponsored projects to build, renovate, or maintain Buddhist religious shrines or monuments. The Government denied that it used coercion and called these contributions "voluntary donations" consistent with Buddhist ideas of meritmaking. 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.

In the past, pagodas or government buildings often have been built on confiscated Muslim land. In 2003, authorities in Kyun Su Township, Tanintharyi division, seized Muslim religious land on which they planned to build a pagoda. Despite complaints by Muslim leaders to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the regional military commander, the Government took no action in this case.

Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), has been in prison or house arrest since forces allied with the Government attacked her and her convoy, which included several NLD-allied monks, while traveling in Sagaing Division in the northwestern region of the country in 2003. The Government reportedly used criminals dressed in monks' robes in the ambush.

Forced Religious Conversion

Muslim and Christian community leaders reported that during the period covered by this report, authorities had moved away from a campaign of forced conversion to Buddhism and instead focused on enticing non-Buddhists to convert to Buddhism 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 2004, in northwestern Shan State, a local government-backed abbot reportedly pressured local Christians to convert to Buddhism, using threats and bribery. Also during the period, there was a single, unverified report of forced conversions at gunpoint in Chin State. However, Christian groups reported that these types of violent cases were less frequent than in earlier years.

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

Since 1994, when Buddhist members split away from the KNU to organize the progovernment 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. In 2004, according to a reliable report, DKBA authorities forced villagers near Hpa-an, Karen State, to provide "volunteer" labor and money to build Buddhist pagodas. Despite a complaint by the local pastor, senior government authorities refused to take any action. There were also unverified reports that DKBA authorities continued to expel villagers who converted to Christianity. In 2003, there was an unverified report that local DKBA commanders forced the local Sangha council to order the demolition of six monasteries in Myawaddy whose abbots had been critical of the DKBA.

According to Shan Herald Agency for News, in April 2006 a local warlord in the Wa Special Region of eastern Shan State detained thirty-eight local Christians in the town of Mong Mai. He charged them with preaching sermons and distributing religious pamphlets without official permission. The Wa authorities sent them to work in labor camps. Subsequently, they released nineteen young people, but the rest reportedly remained in custody at the end of this reporting period.

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. Officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while criticizing the U.S. Government in 2004 for its "lack of basic knowledge and misperceptions regarding the situation and concept of religions" in the country, have declined to meet with U.S. embassy officials to discuss the content of the previous year's report.

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 religiously-affiliated organizations and NGOs. The Charge d'Affaires hosted members of Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic organizations at her residence.

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. In addition, the embassy worked closely with Islamic and Christian NGOs involved in 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. These sanctions include a ban on imports from the country, a ban on the export of financial services to the country, a ban on bilateral aid to the Government, a ban on the export of arms to the country, and a suspension of 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. It also has opposed all assistance to the Government by international financial institutions and urged the Governments of other countries to take similar actions. New investment in the country by U.S. citizens has been 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 67,000 square miles, and its population was approximately 13.8 million. An estimated 93 percent of the population was Hinayana, or Theravada, Buddhist. The Hinayana Buddhist tradition was widespread and strong in all provinces, with an estimated 4,100 pagodas found throughout the country. Since the vast majority of ethnic Khmer Cambodians were Buddhist, there is a close association between Buddhism, Khmer cultural traditions, and daily life. Adherence

to Buddhism generally is considered intrinsic to the country's ethnic and cultural identity. The Mahayana branch of Buddhism is practiced by approximately 150,000 followers and had 63 temples throughout the country.

There were approximately 500,000 to 700,000 Muslims (an estimated 4 percent to 8 percent of the population), predominantly ethnic Chams, who generally were found in towns and rural fishing villages on the banks of the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers and in Kampot Province. There were four branches of Islam represented: The Malay-influenced Shafi 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; the traditional Iman-San branch, practiced by 3 percent; and the Kadiani branch, which also contributed 3 percent. There were 200 to 300 mosques of the 4 main branches and 200 to 300 small Surav mosques, which had congregations of up to 40 persons and did not have a min-bar from which Friday sermons are given. The small, although growing, Christian community constituted approximately 2 percent of the population. There were an estimated 100 Christian organizations or denominations that operated freely throughout the country and include approximately 2,400 churches. However, only 900 of these churches were officially registered. Other religious organizations with small followings included the Vietnamese Cao Dai religion and the Baha'i Faith, each with an estimated 2,000 practicing members.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses, operated freely. They faced no barriers, except for a ban on door-to-door proselytizing during the daily lunch hours of noon to 2:00 p.m.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 ones, 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.

In April 2005 an Islamic conference, which drew approximately twenty-thousand Muslims from throughout the country and from other countries, was held in Kampong Cham Province without obtaining permission from the Ministry of Cults and Religious Affairs. Organizers obtained permission only from the district level for the conference. Local and national authorities did not interfere with or sanction the organizers. Religious groups have not encountered significant difficulties in obtaining approval for construction of places of worship. No significant constraints on religious assembly were reported during the period covered by this report.

The Directive on Controlling External Religions requires registration of places of worship and religious schools, in addition to government approval prior to constructing new places of worship. Places of worship must be located at least two kilometers from each other and may not be used for political purposes or to house criminals or fugitives from the law. The distance limitation has begun to be enforced but applies only to new construction of places of worship and not to offices of religious organizations. The order requires that religious teachings respect other religions.

Government officials continued to organize annual meetings for representatives of all religious groups to discuss religious developments and to address issues of concern.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Foreign missionary groups generally operated freely throughout the country and did not encounter significant difficulties in performing their work. Government officials expressed appreciation for the work of many foreign religious groups in providing much needed assistance in education, rural development, and training. However, officials also expressed some concern that foreign groups used the guise of reli-

gion to become involved in illegal or political affairs. During the reporting period, the Government did not close any Islamic schools (madrasas) as it had in the past. On December 29, 2004, a court convicted three persons connected with the school of assisting in a planned terrorist attack on the embassy of a Western country.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

Minority religious groups experienced little or no societal discrimination during the period covered by this report; however, Muslims and Christians reported a few 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 often are supported by funding from foreign public or private groups.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives met with religious leaders on these issues and contacted representatives of religious nongovernmental organizations and other groups representing the Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian faiths. In 2005 the embassy expanded its Muslim outreach program, which provides for additional channels of information on the status of religious freedom in the country among the Muslim population while also providing material assistance. Through this program, the U.S. Government gave assistance to four Islamic organizations that actively conducted human rights and democracy training in Phnom Penh, and the provinces of Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, Kampot, Siem Riep, Kratie, and Kampong Cham to increase awareness of human rights within the Muslim community. In 2005 the embassy continued to provide financial support to an additional Muslim group for the Cham Muslim radio hour. The embassy's outreach program distributed Khmer-language versions of the booklet "Muslim Life in America" throughout ten provinces around the country, particularly during the embassy's Ramadan outreach programs and representation events.

Similarly, the embassy has worked to maintain close contacts with the Buddhist religious community through visits to wats and pagodas. The highest profile visit of 2005 occurred in December when the ambassador and nearly 200 embassy personnel visited Phnom Penh's most venerated Buddhist shrine, Wat Phnom, located adjacent to the new embassy compound. Additionally, two Buddhist organizations received U.S. Government grants to support their human rights and cultural preservation activities. The first grant went to the Khmer Buddhist Society in Cambodia (KBSC) to fund a series of workshops entitled "Buddhist Response to Community Dispute Resolution" in Preah Vihear Province. The second went to the Buddhist Institute to support the preservation of thirty oral folktales collected from elderly Buddhists throughout the country. These projects afforded embassy officers the opportunity to meet with Buddhist religious figures on numerous occasions and assess the operating environment for the dominant religion in the country.

CHINA

Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibetan areas of China are appended at the end of this report.

The constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth

and scope of activities of religious groups. The Government tries to control and regulate religion to prevent the rise of groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Nonetheless, membership in many faiths is growing rapidly.

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for religious groups and spiritual movements that are not registered with the Government. Unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference and harassment. Members of some unregistered religious groups were subjected to restrictions, including intimidation, harassment, and detention. Unregistered religious groups were pressured to register with government organs and government-sanctioned "patriotic" religious associations linked to the five main religions—Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

Religious practice and worship in officially sanctioned and unregistered places of worship continued to grow throughout the country, as did the number of religious believers. 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. 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. In most areas of the country, religious believers could worship without difficulty in officially approved venues. The Government in some locations built new places of worship to accommodate increasing numbers of religious believers.

Repression of unregistered Protestant church networks and "house" churches continued to be widely reported. Central Government officials stated that friends and family holding prayer meetings at home need not register with the Government, but China's regulations on religious affairs (RRA) state that formal worship should take place only in government-approved venues. Sources in many locations continued to report that police and officials of local Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) interfered with house church meetings, often accusing the house church of disturbing neighbors or disrupting social order. House church leaders asserted that police routinely used noise complaints as a pretext for raiding their meetings. When police disrupted meetings, they sometimes detained worshippers attending such services for hours or days and prevented further house worship in the venues. Leaders sometimes faced harsher treatment, including detention, formal arrest and sentencing to reeducation or imprisonment. Again, treatment of unregistered groups varied regionally. For example, some local officials in Henan Province often mistreated unregistered Protestants, and some local officials in Hebei Province tightly controlled Roman Catholics loyal to the Vatican. In many localities, however, officials worked closely with registered religious groups to accomplish religious and social goals.

Government officials continued to scrutinize closely contacts between citizens and foreigners involved in religion. The Government detained some citizens for providing religious information to foreigners and prevented some religious figures from traveling abroad, including Henan Province Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang, who remained jailed, and Beijing church historian Zhang Yinan, whom authorities placed under house arrest and refused to issue a passport. In June 2006, Pastor Zhang Rongliang was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison for obtaining a passport through fraud and illegal border crossing. "Underground" Catholic bishops also faced repression, in large part due to their loyalty to the Vatican, which the Government accused of interfering in the country's internal affairs. The Government showed some signs of willingness to improve relations with the Vatican after the appointment of Pope Benedict XVI, but Beijing and the Vatican clashed in April 2006 over control of the process of ordaining bishops.

Despite government statements that minors are free to receive religious training that does not interfere with their secular education, there were ongoing reports of minors being prevented from receiving religious education. In August 2005 Uighur teacher Aminan Momixi and thirty students were detained after Momixi held Qur'an study sessions in her home during summer vacation.

There was little evidence that the RRA, which took effect in 2005, improved the situation of religious freedom. While the regulations brought regulatory activities governing religious affairs within a legal framework, they continued to define only government-approved practices and faiths as normal or legitimate.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as "cults" in general and of small Christian-based groups and the Falun Gong in particular. In June 2006 Pastor Xu Shuangfu and five other members of the Three Grades of Servants church, which the Government also considers a cult, were sentenced to

death in a murder case involving conflict between the church and the Eastern Lightning group, which China also considers a cult. Scores of Three Grades of Servants church members were tried during the period covered by this report. Falun Gong practitioners continued to face arrest, detention, and imprisonment, and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons, reeducation through labor camps, and extra-judicial "legal education" centers, while some who recanted returned from detention. Reports of abuse were difficult to confirm within the country and the group engaged in almost no public activity within the country. Overseas Falun Gong practitioners claimed this was a result of the harsh government campaign, which began with the 1999 crackdown against the group. There were continuing revelations about the extra-legal activities of the Government's "610 office" including torture and forced confessions, a state security agency implicated in most alleged abuses of Falun Gong practitioners.

Some social tension existed between religious believers and nonbelievers. Religious communities generally coexist without significant friction.

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 the country. U.S. officials condemned abuses while supporting positive trends within the country. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with government leaders, including in his April 2006 and November and September 2005 meetings with President Hu Jintao. President Bush discussed religious freedom and attended a church service during his November 2005 visit to Beijing. At the White House in May 2006 President Bush met with three Christian intellectuals who are leaders in the house church movement: Yu Jie, Li Baiguang, and Wang Yi at the White House in May 2006. Senior U.S. officials called on the Government to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and to respect religious freedom. Assistant secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Barry Lowenkron held talks on religious freedom during a February 2006 visit to Beijing. 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 Chinese officials. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In Washington and in Beijing, in public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise religious freedom and to release all those serving sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 3.5 million square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2005 Government White Paper, there were "more than 100 million religious adherents," representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. According to this official publication, the country had more than 85,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, and more than 3,000 religious organizations. These same official statistics have been used unchanged since 1997, when the State Council Information Office published a White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief. Given the growth in religion since 1997, unpublished estimates suggest the country had over 200 million believers and 100,000 sites for religious activities.

The country has five main religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. While these are the primary religions, the 2005 religious affairs regulations did not identify "official" religions. The Russian Orthodox Church also operated in some regions, and other religions existed in the country's expatriate community. Most of the country's population did not formally practice any religion. Approximately 8 percent of the population was Buddhist, approximately 1.5 percent was Muslim, an estimated 0.4 percent belonged to the official Catholic Church, an estimated 0.4 to 0.6 percent belonged to the unofficial Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church, an estimated 1.2 to 1.5 percent was registered as Protestant, and perhaps 2.5 percent worshipped in Protestant house churches that were independent of government control.

Religious officials offered no official estimate of the number of Taoists, but academics placed the number at several hundred thousand. According to the Taoist Association, there were more than 25,000 Taoist monks and nuns and more than 1,500 Taoist temples.

Traditional folk religions (worship of local gods, heroes, and ancestors) have been revived, are practiced by hundreds of millions of citizens, and are tolerated to varying degrees as loose affiliates of Taoism, Buddhism, or ethnic minority cultural practices. During the year, the national religious affairs ministry known as SARA (the State Administration for Religious Affairs) set up a new unit to supervise folk religions as well as religions outside the main five, including religions practiced by foreigners.

The Government estimated that there are more than 100 million Buddhists, making Buddhism the organized religion with the largest body of followers. However, it was difficult to estimate accurately the number of Buddhists because they did not have congregational memberships and often did not participate in public ceremonies. The Government reported that there were 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries and more than 200,000 nuns and monks. Most believers, including most ethnic Han Buddhists, practiced Mahayana Buddhism. Most Tibetans and ethnic Mongolians practiced Tibetan Buddhism, a Mahayana adaptation. Some ethnic minorities in southwest Yunnan Province practiced Theravada Buddhism, the dominant tradition in neighboring Southeast Asia.

According to government figures, there were 20 million Muslims, more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (more than half of which are in Xinjiang), and more than 45,000 imams nationwide. The country had 10 predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, the largest of which were the Hui, estimated to number nearly 10 million. Hui are centered in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, but there were significant concentrations of Hui throughout the country, including in Gansu, Henan, Qinghai, Yunnan, Hebei, and Xinjiang Provinces. Hui slightly outnumbered Uighur Muslims, who lived primarily in Xinjiang. According to an official 2005 report, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region had 23,788 mosques and 26,000 clerics at the end of 2003, but observers noted that fewer than half of the mosques were authorized to hold Friday prayer and holiday services. The country also had more than 1 million Kazakh Muslims and thousands of Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baoan, and Tatar Muslims.

Approximately 8 to 10 million Catholics lived in the country, according to Chinese Catholics, although precise figures were difficult to determine. These included both the 4.5 million persons registered with the official Catholic Patriotic Association and an equal or greater number who worship in unregistered Catholic churches affiliated with the Vatican. According to official figures, the government-approved Catholic Patriotic Association had 67 bishops, 5,000 priests and nuns, and more than 6,000 churches and meetinghouses. There were thought to be approximately forty bishops operating "underground," some of who were likely in prison or under house arrest.

The Government maintained that the country had more than 16 million Protestants, more than 55,000 registered churches and other places of worship, and 18 theological schools. Officials from the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (the state-approved Protestant religious organization) had estimated that at least 20 million Chinese worship in official churches. One local academic put the number of Protestants between 50 and 60 million, including both officially approved and unregistered churches. Foreign sources estimated that there were between 80–100 million Protestants worshipping in unregistered churches. A 2004 nongovernmental survey in Beijing tallied over 100,000 unregistered Protestants, far more than the 30,000 registered with authorities. Domestic and foreign experts agreed that the number of Protestants was growing rapidly. According to state-run media reports in August 2004, the number of Protestants was increasing by up to 600,000 annually. While it is difficult to arrive at an exact estimate, Christian groups outside China believe that the number of Chinese attending unregistered churches is expanding at a much faster rate.

Falun Gong blends aspects of Taoism, Buddhism, and the meditation techniques and physical exercises of qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi. Despite the spiritual content of some of Li's teachings, Falun Gong does not consider itself a religion and has no clergy or places of worship. Estimates of the number of Falun Gong (or Wheel of the Law, also known as Falun Dafa) practitioners varied widely; the Government claimed that prior to its harsh crackdown on the Falun Gong beginning in 1999, there might have been as many as 2.1 million adherents of Falun Gong in the country. Some estimated that the true number of Falun Gong adherents in the country before the crackdown was much higher. The number has declined as a result of the crackdown, but there were still hundreds of thousands of practitioners in the country, according to reliable estimates.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to manage religious affairs by restricting religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of activities of religious groups to prevent the rise of possible competing sources of authority outside of the control of the Government.

The criminal law states that government officials who deprive citizens of religious freedom may, in serious cases, be sentenced to up to two years in prison; however, there were no known cases of persons being punished under this statute.

The state reserves itself the right to register and thus to allow particular religious groups and spiritual movements to operate. For each of the five main religions, there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities and with which religious groups must affiliate. SARA is responsible for monitoring and judging the legitimacy of religious activity. SARA and the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD) provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of government regulations regarding religious activity, including the role of foreigners in religious activity. Employees of SARA and the UFWD are rarely religious adherents and often are party members. Communist Party members are directed by party doctrine to be atheists and their family members are discouraged from public participation in religious ceremonies.

Public security forces maintain designated units charged with monitoring religious behavior that violates law or regulation. Such police monitor unregistered facilities, check to see that religious activities do not disrupt public order, and combat illegal cults.

In March 2005 the Government enacted the RRA, replacing previous 1994 regulations governing religious sites. The regulations regularize management of religious affairs within a legal framework and codify pre-existing administrative practice and regulation. Unlike the 1994 regulations, the RRA protect the rights of registered religious groups, under certain conditions, 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. There was little evidence that the new regulations improved religious freedom.

Like the 1994 law, the RRA require religious groups to register places of worship. Spiritual activities in places of worship that have not registered may be considered illegal, and participants can be punished. There are five requirements for the registration of "sites for religious activities:" First, establishment of the site must be consistent with the overall purpose of the 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. Government officials claim that registration requirements are simple and places of worship are not required to affiliate with one of the five official "patriotic" religious organizations that correspond to the five main faiths. However, according to the Government's April 2005 policy statement Measures for the Approval of Religious Activities, only pre-existing local, provincial or national-level religious organizations are authorized to apply for approval of a new religious venue and approval is granted only after an inspection by the local Religious Affairs Bureau.

Under the RRA, clergy need not be approved by the Government but must be reported to the Government after being selected pursuant to the rules of the relevant religious association.

Nearly all local RAB officials require Protestant churches to affiliate with the (Protestant) Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC). Credentialing procedures effectively required clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC, a practice that appeared unchanged since adoption of the new regulations. Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refuse to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC. Some groups disagree with the TSPM/CCC teachings that all Protestant beliefs are compatible and that differences between Protestant denominations are irrelevant. In a few regions, Protestant groups have registered without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. These exceptions include the Local Assemblies Protestant churches in Zhejiang Province, where no significant TSPM/CCC community exists, and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province, both of which operate openly without affiliating with the

TSPM/CCC. Additionally, the (Russian) Orthodox Church has been able to operate without affiliating with a government organization in a few parts of the country. In other regions, officially "post-denominational" Protestant churches informally aligned themselves with Protestant denominations. Some pastors in official churches said that denominational affiliation was an important way of drawing parishioners.

Some groups register voluntarily, some register under pressure, and authorities refuse to register others. Some religious groups have declined to register out of principled opposition to state control of religion. Others do not register due to fear of adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders or members. Unregistered groups also frequently refuse to register for fear that doing so would require theological compromises, curtail doctrinal freedom, or allow government authorities to control sermon content. Some groups claimed that authorities refused them registration without explanation or detained group members who met with officials to attempt to register. The Government contended that these refusals mainly were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities or failure to meet other legal requirements.

The Government has banned all groups that it has determined to be "cults," including the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church, the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), the Three Grades of Servants (also known as San Ba Pu Ren), the Association of Disciples, the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, the Family of Love, the South China Church, the Falun Gong, and the Zhong Gong movements. (Zhong Gong is a qigong exercise discipline with some mystical tenets.)

After the revised criminal law came into effect in 1997, offenses related to membership in unapproved cults and religious groups were classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. A ban on cults, including the Falun Gong spiritual movement, was enacted in 1999. Under Article 300 of the criminal law, "cult" members who "disrupt public order" or distribute publications may be sentenced to three to seven years in prison, while "cult" leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to seven years or more in prison. Under the new Public Security Administrative Punishment Law, which took effect March 1, 2006. Falun Gong adherents could face five to fifteen days of administrative detention and fines of up to $125 (1,000 RMB) for using superstitious cults or qigong activities to disrupt public order or harm public health. Public security officials said the law would be used against Falun Gong.

Government sensitivity to Muslim communities varied widely. In some predominantly Muslim areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially in Xinjiang among the Uighurs, officials continued to restrict or tightly control religious expression and teaching. Police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused by the Government of supporting separatism. The Government permits, and in some cases subsidizes, Muslim citizens who make the Hajj to Mecca. More than 10 thousand Chinese Muslims made the Hajj journey in 2006, and some 6,900 traveled in groups sponsored by the China Islamic Association.

In past years local officials destroyed several unregistered places of worship, although there were no reports of widespread razing of churches or shrines during the period covered by this report. The Government has restored or rebuilt churches, temples, mosques, and monasteries damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and allowed the reopening of some seminaries, although the pace and scope of restoration activity has varied from locality to locality. There is far greater interest in religion and a far greater number of religious adherents today than at any time since the 1949 establishment of the People's Republic. Nonetheless, there remained a shortage of temples, churches, and mosques and many of those that existed are overcrowded and in poor condition.

In January 2005 the Government organized a national meeting on religion. The meeting addressed similar themes to a series of conferences on religion in January 2004 that advised officials to guard against Christian-influenced "cults" and avoid "foreign infiltration under cover of religion." In early 2005 five government training sessions were held across the country for approximately 3,000 religious affairs officials to educate them about the RRA.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for religious freedom and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for members of many unregistered religious groups and for groups, such as the Falun Gong, which the Government considered "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.

Some local authorities continued a selective crackdown on unregistered religious groups, and the Central Government did not oppose this crackdown. Police closed unregistered mosques and temples, as well as some Catholic churches and Protestant "house churches," many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. Several unregistered church leaders reported continuing pressure from local authorities. Despite these efforts at control, official sources, religious professionals, and members of both officially sanctioned and unregistered places of worship all reported that the number of religious adherents in the country continued to grow.

The Government makes political demands on the clergy or leadership of registered groups. For example, authorities have required clergy to publicly endorse government policies or denounce Falun Gong. In other areas, including Xinjiang and the Tibetan Autonomous Region, authorities require clergy to participate in patriotic education. The Government continued its harsh repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement and of "cults" in general. As in past years, local authorities moved against houses of worship outside their control that grew too large or espoused beliefs considered threatening to "state security." Overall, the basic policy of permitting religious activity to take place relatively unfettered in government-approved sites and under government control remained unchanged.

Official tolerance for Buddhism and Taoism has been greater than that for Christianity, and these religions often face fewer restrictions. However, as these non-Western religions have grown rapidly in recent years, there were signs of greater government concern and new restrictions, especially on groups that blend tenets from a number of religious beliefs. The Government also sought to regulate closely the financial affairs of Buddhist and Taoist temples.

During the period covered by this report, government repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement continued. Membership in the Falun Gong and other groups considered cults was illegal. Distributing Falun Gong literature or encouraging others to join the spiritual movement was punishable by criminal and administrative sanctions, including reeducation. As in past years, foreigners who distributed Falun Gong materials were expelled from the country, including an Australian expelled in October 2005 after attempting to distribute the book Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party. In January 2006 the Government released U.S. citizen Charles Lee after three years of imprisonment for Falun Gong-related activities. The authorities also continued to oppose other groups the Government considered "cults," such as the Xiang Gong, Guo Gong, and Zhong Gong qigong groups.

The Government has labeled folk religions as "feudal superstition," and followers sometimes were subject to harassment and repression.

Despite the new religious affairs regulations, officials in many locations continued to pressure religious groups to register with government religious affairs authorities. There was a great deal of variation in how local authorities handled unregistered religious groups. In certain regions, government supervision of religious activity was minimal, and registered and unregistered churches existed openly side-by-side and were treated similarly by the authorities. In such areas, many congregants worshipped in both types of churches. In other regions, local officials supervise religion more strictly, and authorities cracked down 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.

In some areas, despite the rapidly growing religious population, it remained difficult to register new places of worship, even for officially recognized churches and mosques.

Local officials have great discretion in determining whether "house churches" violate regulations. The term "house church" is used to describe both unregistered churches and gatherings in homes or businesses of groups of Christians to conduct small, private worship services. SARA officials confirmed during the year that unregistered churches are illegal, but said prayer meetings and Bible study groups held among friends and family in homes are legal and need not register. In some parts of the country, unregistered house churches with hundreds of members meet openly with the full knowledge of local authorities, who characterize the meetings as informal gatherings to pray, sing, and study the Bible. In other areas, house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends are not permitted. House churches often encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups or with coreligionists overseas. Urban house churches are generally limited to meet-

ings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas may number in the hundreds.

Both official and unofficial Christian churches have problems training adequate numbers of clergy to meet the needs of their growing congregations. Due to restrictions and prohibitions on religion between 1955 and 1985, no priests or other clergy in the official churches were ordained during that period; most priests and pastors were trained either before 1955 or after 1985, resulting in a shortage of trained clerics between the ages of forty and seventy. Thus, as senior clerics retire, there are relatively few experienced clerics to replace them. The Government states that the official Catholic Church has trained more than 900 priests in the past 10 years. The Government permits registered religions to train clergy and allows limited numbers of Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics, and Buddhist clergy to go abroad for additional religious studies, but some religious students have had difficulty obtaining approval to study abroad. In most cases, foreign organizations provide funding for such training programs. In the past, some Catholic clerics had complained that they were forced to bribe local officials before being allowed to enter seminaries. Due to government prohibitions, unofficial or unregistered churches have particularly significant problems training clergy, and many clergy receive only limited and inadequate preparation.

The law does not prohibit religious believers from holding public office; however, party membership is required for almost all high-level positions in Government, state-owned businesses, and many official organizations. Communist Party officials confirmed during the period covered by this report that party membership and religious belief were incompatible. The CCP reportedly has issued two circulars since 1995 ordering party members not to hold religious beliefs and ordering the expulsion of party members who belong to religious organizations, whether open or clandestine. Muslims allegedly have been fired from government posts for praying during working hours. The "Routine Service Regulations" of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) state explicitly that servicemen "may not take part in religious or superstitious activities." Party and PLA military personnel have been expelled for adhering to the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

In past years, government sources reported that up to 25 percent of Communist Party officials in certain localities engage in some kind of religious activity. Most officials who practice a religion are Buddhists or practice a form of folk religion. Some religious figures, while not members of the CCP, are included in national and local government organizations, usually to represent their constituency on cultural and educational matters. The National People's Congress (NPC) includes several religious leaders. Two of the NPC Standing Committee's vice chairmen are Fu Tieshan, a bishop and vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and Phagpalha Geleg Namgyal, a Tibetan "living Buddha." Religious groups also are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory forum that is led by the CCP and consults with social groups outside the Party.

The Roman Catholic Church forbids abortions and the use of artificial contraception. Some Chinese Catholics consider the Government's birth limitation laws and policies a violation of their religious freedom. In many parts of the country, women are required to use contraception and to have an abortion if the pregnancy violates government population control regulations.

The Government does not allow the government-authorized Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and its clergy to recognize the authority of the pope in some matters, which remained a significant reason for the persistence of a large unregistered Catholic church that remained unaffiliated with the Government and Patriotic Association. Pressure by the Patriotic Association on unregistered Catholic bishops to join the official Church continued, and unregistered priests and bishops were often detained. Despite some efforts toward rapprochement between the Government and the Vatican, the Government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and there was no Vatican representative on the Mainland. The Vatican's diplomatic recognition of Taiwan and differences over selection of bishops remained the primary obstacles to improved relations. After the death of Pope John Paul II in 2005, Government and religious officials made conciliatory statements and welcomed Pope Benedict XVI. The Vatican invited four Chinese bishops, including one not recognized by the Government, to an October 2005 synod in Rome, but the Patriotic Association declined the invitations.

In March 2006 a dispute erupted between the Patriotic Association and the Vatican after the Vatican elevated prodemocracy Hong Kong Bishop Joseph Zen to cardinal. In April and May, the Patriotic Association ignored a Vatican request to delay the ordinations of Bishops Ma Yingling of Kunming, Yunnan Province, and Liu Xinhong of Wuhu, Anhui Province. The Vatican criticized the ordinations as illicit and referred to the possibility of excommunication of those ordained or conducting

an ordination without papal approval. The Patriotic Association and SARA responded that the bishops had been democratically elected by priests of their dioceses and that the Vatican was interfering in the country's internal affairs. The disagreement disrupted a period of more than two years during which several Bishops were appointed with both Government's and Vatican approval, including auxiliary bishops in Shanghai and Xian. Other bishops, however, were ordained with both government and Vatican approval before and after the dispute began. An increasing number of 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, most 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 government-affiliated church conflicted directly with the 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 Patriotic Association said more than forty of China's nearly one hundred dioceses had no bishop in place.

There were large Muslim populations in many areas, but government sensitivity to these communities varied widely. Generally speaking, the country's Hui Muslims, who were ethnically Han Chinese and lived in Han communities throughout the country had greater religious freedom than Turkic Muslims such as the Uighurs, who were concentrated in the western part of the country. In areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially among the Uighurs in Xinjiang, regulations restricting Muslims' religious activity, teaching, and places of worship continued to be implemented forcefully. In Xinjiang officials continued to restrict the building of mosques and the training of clergy and prohibited the teaching of Islam to children. In addition to the restrictions on practicing religion placed on party members and government officials throughout the country, Muslim teachers, professors, and university students in Xinjiang are not allowed to attend mosque services or practice religion openly. Female university students and professors are discouraged from wearing headscarves or skirts. Some ethnic Tajiks in Xinjiang cannot attend mosque until over age 30. However, in other areas, particularly in areas populated by the Hui ethnic group, there was substantial mosque construction and renovation and also apparent freedom to worship. Xinjiang authorities continued to use counter terrorism as a pretext for religious repression of Uighur Muslims, according to human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Because the Xinjiang Government regularly fails to distinguish carefully among those involved in peaceful activities in support of independence, "illegal" religious activities, and violent terrorism, it is often difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those seeking to worship, those peacefully seeking political goals, or those engaged in violence. As a result, Xinjiang authorities often charge religious believers with committing the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and Muslim extremism. While targeted at Muslims, this tight control of religion in Xinjiang affected followers of other religions as well. Xinjiang provincial-level Communist Party and government officials repeatedly called for stronger management of religious affairs and for the separation of religion from administrative matters.

Xinjiang officials told foreign observers that children under eighteen are not permitted to attend religious services in mosques in Xinjiang. However, children were observed attending prayer services at mosques in Beijing and other parts of the country. Fundamentalist Muslim leaders received particularly harsh treatment. In 2000 the authorities began conducting monthly political study sessions for religious personnel; the program reportedly continued during the period covered by this report. In August 2005 the Government reportedly banned the Sala movement of Islam and detained more than 150 followers in Xinjiang. Moreover, security authorities were authorized to "strike hard" against groups believed to have plans to disrupt celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Government's rule in Xinjiang in October 2005. This included restrictions on a movement of Islam called Salafism due to concerns followers supported extremism. No disruptions were reported, but scores were reportedly harassed and detained in the run-up to the anniversary. Because of government control of information coming from Xinjiang, many reported restrictions were difficult to confirm.

In a growing number of areas, authorities have displayed increasing tolerance of religious practice by foreigners, provided their religious observance does not involve nationals. Weekly services of the foreign Jewish community in Beijing have been held uninterrupted since 1995, and High Holy Day observances have been allowed for more than fifteen years. Both Reform and Orthodox Jewish services were held weekly during the period covered by this report. The Shanghai Jewish community

has received permission from authorities to hold a few services each year in a historic Shanghai synagogue that was converted into a government office. However, officials gave a former synagogue in Harbin to the Russian Orthodox community, causing some tension between the local Russian Orthodox and expatriate Jewish groups. Expatriate members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church or Mormons) met regularly in a number of cities. The LDS Church had permission to hold services in a Beijing facility reserved for its use. A group consisting of citizens who joined the LDS Church while overseas also regularly used the same facility, although not at the same time as expatriates. Bah'ai representatives reportedly approached the Government about gaining greater freedom of religion as well. The Government stated it was willing to consider approving new religious organizations outside the five main faiths but had not yet done so at the end of the reporting period.

Regulations enacted in 1994 and expanded in 2000 codified many existing rules involving foreigners, including a ban on proselytizing. However, for the most part, authorities allowed foreign nationals to preach to other foreigners, bring in religious materials for personal use, and preach to citizens at churches, mosques, and temples at the invitation of registered religious organizations. Foreigners could and often did attend worship services at registered churches, mosques, and temples in major cities, where many local houses of worship offered services in languages other than Chinese. Foreigners legally are barred from conducting missionary activities; however, foreign Christians teaching on college campuses openly profess their faith with minimum interference from the authorities, provided their proselytizing remains discreet. Many 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. In addition Buddhist-run private schools and orphanages in the central part of the country also offer training to teenagers and young adults.

Some foreign church organizations came under pressure to register with government authorities, and some foreign missionaries whose activities extended beyond the expatriate community were expelled or asked to leave the country. In 2003, the Government banned the documentary film "The Cross" and the book "Jesus in Beijing."

The increase in the number of Christians in the country has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles. Bibles can be purchased at many bookstores and at most officially recognized churches. Many house church members buy their Bibles at such places without incident. A Bible is affordable for most citizens. The supply of Bibles is adequate in most parts of the country, but members of unregistered churches complained that the supply and distribution of Bibles in some places, especially rural locations, was inadequate. Individuals cannot order Bibles directly from publishing houses, and house church Christians reported that purchase 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. Authorities sometimes confiscate Bibles in raids on house churches.

Bibles, like all other literature, can only be published by state-approved publishing houses. The Amity Publishing House in Nanjing has printed more than forty million Bibles in the past twenty-five years. However, as part of a campaign against illegal publishing, religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qur'ans, were often confiscated and the unauthorized publishing houses were often closed. Religious adherents were arrested and jailed on charges of illegal publishing.

The Government teaches atheism in schools. However, university-level study of religion is expanding. Some universities mandated a course on religion for students in certain disciplines during the period covered by this report.

Senior government officials claim that the country has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. However, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Education noted after her 2003 visit that students lack basic internationally recognized rights to religious education. Moreover, some local officials, especially in Xinjiang, prevented children from attending worship services, and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than eighteen from entering. Nongovernmental organizations reported that Christian and Muslim children in Xinjiang were prevented from receiving religious education. In one case, local officials denied a Christian group permission to operate a Sunday school in Urumqi, Xinjiang. To support their rejection of the Sunday school, the officials claimed it would be unfair to local Muslims to allow Christians but not Muslims to educate their youth. In some Muslim areas, minors attend religious schools in addition to state-run schools. In some areas, large numbers of young persons attend religious services at both registered and unregistered places of worship.

There were at least seventy-six Government-recognized training institutions for clergy in the five main religions, including fifty-four Catholic and Protestant seminaries, ten institutes to train imams and Islamic scholars, and dozens of institutes to train Buddhist monks. Students who attend these institutes must demonstrate "political reliability," and all graduates must pass an examination on their theological and political knowledge to qualify for the clergy. Official religious organizations also administered local Bible schools, monastery-run schools, and other types of training centers. The number of secular universities with a center for the study of theology doubled from seventeen in 2002 to thirty-four in 2005.

The Government has stated that there are ten colleges conducting Islamic higher education and two other Islamic schools in Xinjiang operating with government support. In addition, provincial and local Islamic communities have established numerous Arabic schools and mosque schools. The former concentrates on Arabic language study, while the latter often serve as a stepping-stone to apprenticeship as an assistant to an imam or other Muslim religious worker. Some young Muslims study outside of the country in Muslim religious schools.

Religious schools and training institutions for religious leaders other than the officially recognized ones also exist but cannot register as legal institutions. The quality of education at unregistered institutions varies. Some such institutions are closed when they come to the attention of local authorities.

Officials sometimes refused to issue passports to religious figures, especially those from unregistered groups. Zhang Yinan, a house church historian released from reeducation in 2005, was denied a passport on such grounds during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, unapproved religious and spiritual groups remained under scrutiny, and in some cases officials harassed members of such groups. In some areas, 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, were subject to government pressure and sometimes suffered abuse.

Offenses related to membership in unapproved religious groups are often classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. According to the Law Yearbook of China, 8,119 cases of disturbing the social order or cheating by the use of superstition were filed in 2004, of which 7,751 resulted in formal charges, criminal, or administrative punishment. The number was approximately the same as in the previous year. Government officials said that no persons were prosecuted for their religious belief or activity. 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. The Government's restrictions on unregistered religious groups increased in 1999 in response to large public protests by the Falun Gong in sensitive locations including Tiananmen Square and the Zhongnanhai Communist Party leadership compound.

Religious adherents were beaten, and some died in police custody after being detained in connection with their religious belief or practice. In June 2004, the government-run Legal Daily newspaper reported that Jiang Zongxiu had died in police custody in Zunyi, Guizhou Province, after being arrested for distributing Bibles. A Legal Daily editorial comment condemned local officials for mistreating Jiang. In 2004, Gu Xianggao, allegedly a member of the Three Grades of Servants Church that the Goverrnment considers a cult (discussed below), was beaten to death in a Heilongjiang Province security facility. Public security officials paid compensation to Gu's family. 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 November 2005 hired thugs beat sixteen nuns, one of whom was blinded and another partially paralyzed, when the nuns protested demolition of a Catholic school in Xian. Hundreds of Catholics marched on Government offices in protest, and the Vatican publicly protested the incident.

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. In April 2006 overseas Falun Gong groups claimed that a hospital in Sujiatun, Shenyang, had been 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 hospital.

In December 2005 a Beijing attorney sent an open letter to President Hu Jintao highlighting abuses of Falun Gong practitioners. The letter described the electric shock torture of Zhang Zhikui, a Falun Gong practitioner arrested for repeated petitioning in Beijing, and the October beating death in Changchun, Jilin Province of Liu Boyang and his mother Wang Shouhui. The letter, and a similar open letter sent by the attorney in 2004, referred to the extra-legal activities of the 610 office, reportedly involved in many of the abuses of Falun Gong. In 2005 the Government revoked the attorney's license to practice law, and the attorney has claimed repeated government harassment, including an automobile accident that he publicly described as an "assassination attempt." Foreigners attempting to meet with the attorney have been detained and harassed.

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. NGOs not affiliated with the Falun Gong documented nearly 500 cases of Falun Gong members detained, prosecuted, or sentenced to reeducation during the period covered by this report. Credible estimates suggested the actual number was much higher. In November 2005 police at the Dongchengfang Police Station in Tunzhou City, Hebei Province, reportedly raped two Falun Gong practitioners. Reliable sources indicated that Zheng Ruihuan and Liu Yinglan were detained in Shandong Province in July 2005 for practicing Falun Gong. In May 2006, Yuan Yuju and Liang Jinhui, relatives of a Hong Kong journalist who works for a television station supportive of Falun Gong, were sentenced to reeducation for using an illegal cult to organize and obstruct justice, relating to their distribution of Falun Gong materials. Some foreign observers estimated that at least half of the 250,000 officially recorded inmates in the country's reeducation-through-labor camps were 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 July 2005 six members of the group Way of the Goddess of Mercy (Guanyin Famen), which the Government considers a "cult," were sentenced to two to four years in prison for using a cult organization resulting in the first criminal conviction of members of the group in Xinjiang. According to state-run media, Liu Shuming, Yang Huiqin, Li Yanxin, Liu Wangpeng, Wang Cahojun, and Wang Dexiu, all of Urumqi, Xinjiang, produced material about Guanyin Famen that they intended to circulate.

Many religious leaders and adherents, including those in official churches, have been detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms for activities they claimed related to their religious practice, although 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 three years in reeducation-through-labor camps. Many religious detainees and prisoners were held 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 preach beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine (such as the imminent coming of the Apocalypse or holy war or groups that have charismatic leaders) often are singled out for particularly severe harassment. Some observers have attributed the unorthodox beliefs of some of these groups to poorly trained clergy and lack of access to religious texts.

In Xinjiang, Uighur Muslim Aminan Momixi was detained in August 2005 after teaching the Qur'an to more than thirty students in her home. Provincial officials stated that she was released after a period of education and training, but the Government refused to clarify her whereabouts.

On May 28, 2006, Rebiya Kadeer, a Uighur Muslim activist, was elected president of the Uyghur American Association, an NGO which advocates for the human rights, including religious freedom, of the Uighur people. The following day Xinjiang police arrested three of her adult sons and placed two of her other family members under house arrest. Government officials reportedly beat Kadeer's sons and charged

them with financial crimes related to their mother's business ventures before she was released to the United States.

Protestant Christians who worshipped outside of government-approved venues or 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. U.S. legal permanent resident Wu Hao was detained by security officials in February 2006 after filming house church services in Beijing for a documentary film. As of the end of the reporting period, he had not been charged, and the Government refused to clarify his whereabouts. Henan Province house Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang was convicted in June 2006 of obtaining a passport through fraud and illegal border crossing. He was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison. In August 2004 in Zhejiang Province, the Government convicted Beijing-based house church Christians Liu Fenggang, Xu Yonghai and Zhang Shengqi on charges of disclosing state secrets after they provided an overseas Chinese magazine information about abuse of Christians in the country. Xu and Zhang were released at the expiry of their sentences, but Liu's three-year sentence had not yet expired. In May 2006 after President Bush met with Christian intellectuals in the White House, security officials harassed relatives of at least one of the meeting's participants.

Police and other security officials disrupted Protestant religious retreats and large meetings on many occasions. In July 2005 the Government reportedly detained one hundred Sunday school students in Hebei Province. In August 2005 police reportedly raided a training class in Jiangxi Province for Sunday school teachers. On Christmas Day 2005, police reportedly raided an unregistered church in Manasu County, Xinjiang, destroying property and detained several worshippers. The U.S.-based China Aid Association said more than 200 were detained, including Pastor Guo Xianyao. In February 2006, Lou Yuanqi was reportedly detained for holding unauthorized church services in Xinjiang. In April Li Huimin was reportedly sentenced to reeducation in Henan Province for holding house church meetings at his home. In May several house church activists were detained in Henan Province's Fugou County. At least three remained detained at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government continued its tight monitoring of religious publications. 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. In November 2005 the Government convicted Beijing-based house Christian pastor Cai Zhuohua and two relatives of operating an illegal business based on his work publishing Christian literature. More than 200,000 copies of the Bible and other religious texts were reportedly confiscated from Cai. Despite international appeals on his behalf, he remained jailed on a three-year sentence. In April 2006 Shandong Province pastor Liu Yuhua was detained in Linchu County on similar charges of operating an illegal business after he was found distributing religious texts. In May Anhui Province house church pastor Wang Zaiqing was formally arrested. U.S.-based NGOs said the arrest was in connection with his work publishing Bibles and religious materials.

Gong Shengliang and several other leaders of the unregistered South China Church, which the Government considered to be a cult, reportedly continued to suffer abuse in prison during the period covered by this report. Sentenced to death in 2001 on criminal charges including rape, arson, and assault, Gong Shengliang, Xiu Fuming, and Hu Yong had their sentences reduced to life in prison on retrial in 2002. Li Ying and Gong Bang Kun had their sentences reduced from death to fifteen years in prison. Four female church members who signed statements accusing Gong of sexual crimes were rearrested in 2002 and sentenced to three years' reeducation-through-labor, reportedly for recanting their accusations against Gong. There were reports that Gong suffered physical abuse in prison, in part for refusing to abandon his religious beliefs. Elderly church member Chen Jingmao reportedly was abused in a Chongqing prison for attempting to convert inmates to Christianity. Authorities prevented lawyers for both men from meeting with their clients in jail and from filing appeals on behalf of both men.

Following a 2004 crackdown, more than seventeen members of the Three Grades of Servants Church, which the Government labels a "cult," went on trial for murder and other crimes in late 2005 and early 2006. The alleged murders resulted from a conflict between the church and the Eastern Lightning group, which the Government considers a cult. Xu Shuangfu, leader of the Three Grades of Servants, was convicted of murder in June and, along with church members Li Maoxing and Wang Jun, was sentenced to death. Zhang Min, Zhu Lixing, and Ben Zhonghai received suspended death sentences, and eleven other church members were sentenced to jail terms of three to fifteen years. Even before the verdict in Xu's case had been an-

nounced, Xu's conviction was introduced as evidence in the trials of several 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 in describing what they viewed as their own unaffiliated house church.

A number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during the reporting period prompting Vatican officials to make formal protests. In some locations, local authorities reportedly have forced unregistered priests and believers to choose between joining the official Church and facing punishment such as fines, job loss, periodic 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. Many of those harassed and detained were more than seventy years old.

Numerous detentions of unofficial Catholic clergy were reported, in particular in Hebei Province, traditionally home to many unregistered Catholics. The Government detained unregistered Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hebei, for the eighth time since 2004 and held him for five months. Security authorities detained more than a dozen other priests and seminarians the same month in Zhengding, including Father Yang Jianwei, who remained detained. On September 2 2005, officials reportedly detained two priests from Qingyuan County, Hebei. In November more than a dozen unregistered priests and seminarians were detained across Hebei Province. In January 2006 Father Huo Junlong was reportedly released but kept under house arrest. There was no new information about unregistered Bishop Su Zhimin, who has been unaccounted for since his reported detention in 1997. Reliable reports suggested that he had been held in a government-run guesthouse or an old-age home near Baoding, Hebei Province. The Government continued to deny taking coercive measures against him. In June 2006, an unverified press report circulated that Bishop Su had died in custody. The Government had not responded to requests to clarify his status by the end of the reporting period. Reliable sources also reported that Bishop An Shuxin, Bishop Zhang Weizhu, Father Cui Xing, and Father Wang Quanjun remained detained in Hebei Province. According to reliable reports, Bishop An, Bishop Su's auxiliary bishop, was last seen four years ago. According to the U.S.-based Cardinal Kung Foundation, the whereabouts of Bishops Yao Liang and Zhao Zhendong, detained in past years, remained unknown, while Bishops Fan Zhongliang and Liu Guandong remained under strict surveillance.

Some unregistered Catholic and Protestant leaders reported that the Government organized campaigns to compel them to register, resulting in continued and, in some cases, increased pressure to register their congregations. Officials organizing registration campaigns collected the names, addresses, and sometimes the fingerprints of church leaders and worshippers. On some occasions, church officials were detained when they arrived for meetings called by authorities to discuss registration.

The whereabouts of Buddhist leader Yu Tianjian remained unknown after his August 2004 detention near Tongliao, Inner Mongolia.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 anti-Semitic acts against the few citizens who consider themselves Jewish or against the foreign Jewish community. The Government does not recognize Judaism as an ethnicity or religion. Past restrictions on public display of artifacts by the local Jewish community in Kaifeng have ended, and several academic institutes opened centers for Jewish study in the country.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the number of believers of all religions continued to grow. The Government authorized funding to build new places of worship, and the first new churches built in Beijing since 1949 opened.

The Government responded to many diplomatic requests for greater engagement with the international community on religious freedom issues. As noted above, in 2005, it made public statements that family and friends are free to hold prayer meetings in their own homes, although the Government stated that it would require that formal worship take place in a registered venue.

In April 2006, the Government and the Patriotic Buddhist Association hosted the First World Buddhist Forum in Hangzhou, billed as the first international religious conference in the country since the 1949 Communist Revolution. More than 1,200 Buddhists, mostly ethnic Chinese, from 34 countries attended the session, which

aimed to outline Buddhism's response to social challenges of modern society. The Government-approved Panchen Lama spoke, but the Dalai Lama and his chosen Panchen Lama were not invited to attend (see appendix on Tibetan areas). In 2006 the Government also supported an exhibition of the Government-approved Bible, which toured internationally, including to the United States.

Tibetan nun Phuntsog Nyidrol, who had been detained in 1989 for marching in support of the Dalai Lama and had her sentence extended after recording pro-Dalai Lama songs in prison, was permitted to travel to the United States to receive medical care in March 2006. She had been released from prison in February 2004 and her parole expired in February 2005, but she was not permitted to travel freely, participate in religious life, or receive medical care (see appendix on Tibetan areas).

On April 19 2006, unregistered Bishop Jia Zhiguo of Zhengding, Hebei, was released from custody and allowed to return home, but remained under twenty-four hour police supervision.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The communities of the five main religions—Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism—coexisted without significant friction. The Government preached religious harmony as part of its efforts to build a "harmonious society." However, 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. Tensions also existed between domestic Muslim groups and groups following teachings imported from the Middle East. In the past, Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists have complained about the presence of Christian missionaries in their communities. Christian officials reported some friction in rural areas between adherents of folk religions and Christians who view some folk religion practices as idol worship. In general, the majority of the population shows little interest in religious activities beyond visiting temples during festivals or churches on Christmas Eve or Easter. Religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetans and Uighurs, 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 the Hui, a Muslim ethnic group.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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 the country, focusing attention on abuses and supporting positive trends within the country. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with leaders, including in his November 2005 visit to Beijing and his April 2006 meeting with President Hu Jintao in Washington. While in Beijing, President Bush attended a worship service at a registered church. In May 2006 President Bush met with three Christian intellectuals who are leaders in the house church movement. Secretary of State Rice discussed religious freedom and attended a worship service at a registered church during her March 2005 visit to Beijing. In exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, diplomatic personnel consistently urged both central and local authorities to respect citizens' rights to religious freedom and release all those serving prison sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested vigorously whenever there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and they requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. At the same time, U.S. officials argued to the country's leaders that freedom of religion would strengthen, not harm, the country.

The U.S. embassy and consulates also collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within the country's religious communities, including bishops, priests, and ministers of the official Christian and Catholic churches, as well as Taoist, Muslim, and Buddhist leaders. U.S. officials also met with leaders and members of the unofficial Christian churches. The U.S. Department of State's nongovernmental contacts included experts on reli-

gion 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. The embassy also brought experts on religion from the United States to the country to speak about the role of religion in American life and public policy.

During the period covered by this report, the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, which had included religious freedom as a major agenda item, remained suspended. The most recent dialogue session took place in December 2002.

During the period covered by this report, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Barry Lowenkron traveled to the country to discuss human rights and religious freedom issues with the Government. 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 officials. East Asian and Pacific Affairs Assistant Secretary Christopher Hill also raised religious freedom issues, including cases of concern, with officials. Staff members of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, including of the Office for International Religious Freedom, also traveled to the country to discuss religious freedom issues. They met with government officials responsible for religion and with clergy or practitioners in official and unofficial religious groups.

In June 2006 in Washington, Assistant Secretary Lowenkron met with Uighur Muslim activist Rebiya Kadeer, and Ambassador at large for International Religious Freedom John V. Hanford III met with Tibetan Buddhist nun Phuntsog Nyidrol.

U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing continued to protest individual incidents of abuse. On numerous occasions, the U.S. Department of State, the embassy, and the four consulates in the country protested government actions to curb freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, including the arrests of Falun Gong followers, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, and Catholic and Protestant clergy and believers. The embassy routinely raised reported cases of detention and abuse of religious practitioners with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Administration of Religious Affairs.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated the country as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Economic measures in effect against 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, Hong Kong's 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Six of the largest religious groups have long collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up a joint conference of religious leaders.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) occupies 422 square miles on more than 200 islands and the mainland and its population was an estimated 6.9 million. Approximately 43 percent of the population participated in some form of religious practice. The two largest religions were Buddhism and Taoism, which were often celebrated together in the same temple. Hong Kong was home to approximately 700 thousand Buddhists or Taoists, 320 thousand Protestant Christians, 240 thousand Roman Catholics, and 100 thousand Muslims. There were small numbers of Hindus, Sikhs, and approximately 4 thousand practicing Jews. Many persons also held Confucian beliefs, although few practiced it as a formal religion. Representatives of the spiritual movement Falun Gong stated that their practitioners numbered approximately 500; however, HKSAR government officials claimed the number was lower.

Hong Kong's Protestants had 1,350 congregations representing 50 denominations. The largest Protestant denomination was the Baptist Church, followed by the Lutheran Church. Other major denominations included Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, Christian and Missionary Alliance groups, the Church of Christ in China, Methodists, and Pentecostals. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) was also present.

There were approximately 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, an estimated 800 Christian churches and chapels, 5 mosques, 1 Hindu temple, 1 Sikh temple, and 3 synagogues. Catholics were served by 1 cardinal (appointed in 2006), 1 bishop, 299 priests, 66 monks, and 529 nuns, all of whom maintained traditional links to the Vatican. The assistant secretary general of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference had his office in Hong Kong. Along with its apostolic work, the Catholic Church was engaged in a broad array of social service activities. It operated 317 schools and kindergartens that enrolled more than 264 thousand children. In addition it operated six hospitals, fifteen clinics, twelve social centers, nineteen hostels, thirteen homes for the aged, and nineteen rehabilitation centers. Protestant churches were also deeply involved in education, health care, and social welfare. They ran 3 colleges, 703 schools and nurseries, 7 hospitals, 18 clinics, 35 homes for the elderly, 47 centers for the disabled, and scores of youth and day care centers. Various Muslim organizations also offered 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 on the mainland, teach classes there, and develop two-way student exchanges on an ongoing basis. Numerous foreign missionary groups operated in and out of the HKSAR.

A wide range of faiths was represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service. A large number of influential non-Christians have been educated in Christian schools.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law 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, and a wide range of faiths are represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government and are exempted specifically from the Societies Ordinance, which requires the registration of nongovernmental organizations. Catholics in the HKSAR recognize the pope as the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

Religious groups wishing to purchase a site to construct a school or hospital initiate their request with the Lands Department. Church-affiliated schools make their request to the Education and Manpower Bureau. Church-affiliated hospitals do so with the Health and Welfare Bureau. For other matters, the Home Affairs Bureau functions as a liaison between religious groups and the Government. During the reporting period, 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 acted unfairly and said the two projects fell into different zoning categories. The Government argued that zoning regulations did not discriminate based on religion or ethnicity. The Muslim group provided no further reaction following the Government's explanation. Although not alleging 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 six largest religious groups in Hong Kong (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Roman Catholic, Muslim, and Anglican) hold forty seats on the eight hundred-member Election Committee, which chooses the HKSAR's chief executive. These forty 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 Catholic Church complained that an education bill passed in 2004 limited its control over Catholic schools. The law requires each school that receives government funding to establish a management board and mandates that 40 percent of the board's members be elected by teacher and parent groups. The sponsoring body can appoint the remaining 60 percent. The Catholic Church argued that this interfered with its ability to manage the schools and set curriculum.

The Falun Gong, which considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is registered under the Societies Ordinance. Falun Gong practitioners were able to stage public demonstrations and practice freely. Falun Gong practitioners regularly conducted public protests against the crackdown on fellow practitioners in the PRC. In May 2005 the Court of Final Appeal overturned convictions of eight Falun Gong practitioners who had been charged with obstructing and assaulting police officers during a sit-in protest in 2002. The ruling was widely viewed by observers as an important affirmation of Hong Kong's fundamental freedom of assembly, demonstration, and expression under the basic law. As of May 2006 the Court of Final Appeal had not issued a ruling on the complaint by four Falun Gong members (and the Falun Gong branch of Hong Kong) who were denied entry into the HKSAR for "security reasons" in 2004. The four were trying to attend Falun Gong's annual conference. The HKSAR denied entry to 41 practitioners, but permitted approximately 350 other practitioners to enter the HKSAR and attend the conference. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Xiang Gong and Yan Xin Qigong, were also registered and practiced freely in the HKSAR.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not have jurisdiction over religious practices in the HKSAR.

The Basic Law calls for ties between Hong Kong religious organizations and their mainland counterparts to be based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect."

In March 2006 the Vatican appointed then Bishop Joseph Zen, the head of Hong Kong's Catholic Diocese, to the post of cardinal. The PRC Government responded by warning Cardinal Zen to refrain from commenting on Hong Kong political matters. Despite this, Cardinal Zen remained an outspoken critic of both mainland and HKSAR policies and a strong advocate of religious freedom. When the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association appointed two bishops on the mainland against the wishes of the Vatican in April and May 2006, Cardinal Zen responded that in "China there is only one Catholic Church, and everyone wants to be led by the pope."

Falun Gong is generally free to practice, organize, conduct public demonstrations, and attract public attention for its movement. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in the HKSAR 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. During the period covered by this report, Falun Gong regularly conducted public protests against the repression of fellow practitioners in the PRC near the Hong Kong offices of the PRC Government.

Unlike in previous years, during the reporting period there were no reports that Falun Gong members were denied entry into Hong Kong.

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

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

Two ecumenical bodies facilitate cooperative work among the Protestant churches and encourage local Christians to play an active part in society. Six of the largest religious groups (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Muslim) long have collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up the joint conference of religious leaders.

While Falun Gong practitioners freely and openly practiced their beliefs, they were occasionally subjected to more subtle forms of discrimination from private busi-

nesses in Hong Kong. In September 2005 the Falun Gong's daily newspaper Epoch Times reported that an international hotel chain canceled its conference room booking due to a water leak. The newspaper had booked the room for a forum on the future of China. A Falun Gong spokesperson said that once it became widely known that the Falun Gong had sponsored the conference, a replacement facility could not be found. The group later held the forum in a public park. This is the second time in three years that an international hotel chain canceled a Falun Gong conference room booking. In 2004 a private hotel canceled a Falun Gong banquet room booking because of the group's "terrorist risk," according to Falun Gong representatives. Falun Gong successfully sued the hotel in small claims court.

In February 2006 four men used sledgehammers to break into the Hong Kong office of the Falun Gong-owned newspaper Epoch Times and destroyed an expensive piece of machinery in the paper's print shop. Police investigated the incident but 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 Hong Kong legislators condemned the break-in. After brief initial reports in local daily newspapers, the incident received no follow-up media coverage.

Falun Gong had opened the print shop only two weeks prior to the break-in after experiencing difficulties in finding a local company willing to print their paper. In May 2005 the private printing company the paper had been using refused to renew its contract. Falun Gong alleged the company feared business reprisals from its mainland clients. Falun Gong quickly found another printing company, although the company refused to sign a written contract, and orders had to be placed orally each day. According to Falun Gong representatives, at least ten other printing companies refused to print the 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.

On May 12, 2006, Yu Jie, Li Baiguang, and Wang Yi, three Christian intellectuals, met with President Bush at the White House. The following day, Yu and Li received e-mails from the China Graduate School of Theology (CGST) stating that their scheduled study program had become "unsuitable" due to a certain event that had attracted international attention. On May 15 the Government stated that it had no role in CGST's decision to rescind the invitation to Yu and Li. Yu Jie subsequently visited Hong Kong and participated in public activities while there.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the HKSAR Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Consulate general officers have made clear U.S. Government interest in the full protection and maintenance of freedom of religion, conscience, expression, and association. Consulate general officers at all levels, 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 during the period covered by this report, and Macau SAR Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Macau SAR has a total area of thirteen square miles, and its population is approximately 453 thousand. According to 1996 census figures on religious affiliation, which are the latest available, of the more than 355 thousand persons surveyed, 60.9 percent had no religious affiliation, 16.8 percent were Buddhist, 13.9 percent were "other" (followers of combinations of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian beliefs), 6.7 percent were Roman Catholic, and 1.7 percent were Protestant. The number of active Falun Gong practitioners declined from approximately one hun-

dred persons to an estimated twenty after the movement was banned in mainland China in 1999. There were approximately one hundred Muslims. The SAR had an estimated fifty Buddhist and Taoist temples, sixty Christian churches (of which sixteen are Catholic), and one mosque.

Missionaries were active in Macau and represented a wide range of faiths, although the majority was Catholic.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law, the Macau SAR's constitution, provides for freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach, and freedom to conduct and participate in religious activities. The 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.

There is no state religion.

The Religious Freedom Ordinance requires religious organizations to register with the Identification Services Office. There were no reports of discrimination in the registration process.

Missionaries were free to conduct missionary activities. Nearly forty thousand children are enrolled in Macau's thirty Catholic schools, and a large number of influential non-Christians have been educated in Christian schools. Religious entities can apply to use electronic media to preach, and such applications are generally approved.

The Religious Freedom Ordinance stipulates that religious groups may maintain and develop relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church in Macau recognizes the Pope as the head of the church. In 2003 the Holy See appointed the current coadjutor bishop for the Macau diocese.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not govern religious practices in the Macau SAR. The Basic Law states, "The Government of the Macau Special Administrative Region, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or in the efforts of religious organizations and believers in Macau to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau, or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the region."

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. However, the Falun Gong, although it considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is not registered under the Societies Ordinance. Neither is Falun Gong registered with the Identification Services Office, which has issued no instructions regarding the Falun Gong. Nevertheless, senior SAR Government officials have stated that, despite this lack of registration under the Religious Freedom Ordinance, Falun Gong practitioners may continue their legal activities without government interference. 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.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports during the reporting period of Falun Gong members being denied entry into the SAR. Falun Gong representatives had previously claimed that they were denied entry into Macau, especially during sensitive political periods. For example, in January 2005 Macau immigration officials refused to allow a prominent Falun Gong representative from Hong Kong to enter Macau following the death of former PRC Communist Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang.

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 communities were very good. Citizens generally were very tolerant of others' 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 Macau.

TIBET

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous counties and prefectures in other provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China. The Department of State follows these designations in its reporting. The preservation and development of the Tibetan people's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage and the protection of their fundamental human rights continue to be of concern.

The constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief, and the Government's 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 in Tibetan areas. Although the authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed activities they viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, such as religious activities venerating the Dalai Lama (which the Government described as "splittist").

Overall, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report; however, the atmosphere for religious freedom varied from region to region. Conditions were generally more relaxed in Tibetan autonomous areas outside the TAR, with the exception of parts of Sichuan's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Envoys of the Dalai Lama made visits to China for discussions with Government officials in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 and met with Government officials in Switzerland in 2005. There was a report of the death of a monk from Drepung Monastery in October 2005 following a heated dispute with the monastery's "work team" over his refusal to denounce the Dalai Lama. Although in the past there were reports of the deaths of monks and nuns due to maltreatment in prison, there were no known reports during the period covered by this report. Buddhist leaders such as Gendun Choekyi Nyima and Tenzin Delek remained in detention or prison, and the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama remained in exile. Dozens of monks and nuns continued to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic" 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 Tibet. These restrictions made it impossible to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations.

While there was some friction between Tibetan Buddhists and the growing Muslim Hui population in cities of the Tibetan areas, it was attributable more to economic competition and cultural differences than to religious tensions. The Christian population in the TAR was extremely small. Some converts to Christianity may have encountered societal pressure.

The U.S. Government continued to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas by urging the Central Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom and preserve religious traditions. The U.S. Government protested credible reports of religious persecution and discrimination, discussed specific cases with the authorities, and requested further information about specific incidents.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Tibetan areas of China have an area of 871,649 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas was 5,354,540; 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 Tibetans practiced Tibetan Buddhism and, to a lesser extent, the traditional Tibetan Bon religion. This held true for many Tibetan Government officials and Communist Party members. Bon includes beliefs and ceremonies that practitioners believe predate the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet in the seventh century. 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 Tibet.

The Government's 2005 White Paper stated that, by the end of 2003, there were 1,700 sites in the TAR for Buddhists to conduct religious activities, and approximately 46,000 resident monks and nuns. This figure has been cited since 1996, although the numbers of monks and nuns dropped at many sites as a result of the patriotic education and the expulsion from monasteries and nunneries of many monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama or who were found to be "politically unqualified."

These numbers 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.

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.

In 2005 the State Council introduced new religious affairs regulations that superseded the Government's 1994 regulations on the management of religious sites. The regulations' preamble stated that the provisions aim to protect freedom of religious belief, maintain harmony between different religions and society, and regulate religious affairs throughout the country. On January 17, 2005, according to a Chinese Government website, TAR Vice Chairman Jagra Lobsang Tenzin told a meeting of TAR officials that the regulations provided "a legal weapon to resist foreign forces' taking advantage of religion to infiltrate our country." In January 2006 the official website of Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province announced that it would strengthen the management of religious work by inspecting monasteries to look for elements of instability, enforce controls and collect data on monks and nuns who illegally enter and exit the region, destroy 853 illegal houses and dismiss 1,100 monks and nuns from Yachen Monastery, and destroy 74 illegal houses in Serthar Larang Gar Monastery. An April 2006 report on the same website reiterated that people who illegally exit and reenter and the region would be required to register with the authorities.

Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy, and several other representatives met with Chinese authorities in Bern, Switzerland, in June 2005 and visited Guilin City, China, in February 2006. On previous visits in 2002, 2003, and 2004, Gyari and Kelsang Gyaltsen, the Dalai Lama's envoy, traveled to Beijing, Lhasa, Shanghai, and Tibetan areas of Yunnan Province. The Government asserted that the door to dialogue and negotiation was open, provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirmed that Tibet and Taiwan were inseparable parts of China.

Since the establishment of the TAR in 1965, the Government asserted that it has spent more than $74 million (RMB 600 million) for restoration of the TAR's Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, many of which were destroyed before and during the Cultural Revolution. In 2005–06, the Government largely completed projects it undertook in 2002 to restore the TAR's three most prominent cultural sites: The Potala Palace, the Norbulingka (another former residence of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa), and Sakya Monastery (the seat of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism in rural southern TAR).

Despite these and other efforts, many monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution have not been rebuilt or repaired, and others remained only partially repaired. The Government stated that funding restoration efforts was done to support the practice of religion, but it also was done in part to promote the development

of tourism in Tibetan areas. Most recent restoration efforts were funded privately, although a few religious sites also were receiving government support for reconstruction projects at the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government officials closely associated Buddhist monasteries with proindependence activism in Tibetan areas of China. Spiritual leaders encountered difficulty re-establishing historical monasteries due to lack of funds, general limitations on monastic education, and denials of government permission to build and operate religious institutions, which officials in some areas contended were a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. The Government stated that there were no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, and that each monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC) decided independently how many monks the monastery could support. Many of these committees were government-controlled, and in practice the Government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, particularly in the TAR. The Government had the right to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders; however, the Government did not necessarily exercise this right in practice during the year. Authorities curtailed the traditional practice of sending young boys to monasteries for religious training by means of regulations that forbade monasteries from accepting individuals under the age of eighteen. Nevertheless, some monasteries continued to admit younger boys, often delaying their formal registration until the age of eighteen.

The Government continued to oversee the daily operations of major monasteries. The Government, which did not contribute to the monasteries' operating funds, retained management control of monasteries through the DMCs and local religious affairs bureaus. Regulations restricted leadership of many DMCs to "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns and specified that the Government must approve all members of the committees. At some monasteries, government officials were members of the committees.

The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in the TAR and other Tibetan areas remained inadequate; many teachers were in exile, older teachers were not being replaced, and those remaining in Tibetan areas outside the TAR had difficulty securing permission to teach in the TAR. In recent years, DMCs at several large monasteries began to use funds generated by the sales of entrance tickets or donated by pilgrims for purposes other than the support of monks engaged in full-time religious study. As a result, some "scholar monks" who had formerly been fully supported had to engage in income-generating activities. Some experts were concerned that, as a result, fewer monks would be qualified to serve as teachers in the future. While local government officials' attempts to attract tourists to religious sites provided some monasteries with extra income, they also deflected time and energy from religious instruction. There were reports of disagreements between monastic leaders and government officials over visitors, vehicle traffic, and culturally inappropriate construction near monastic sites. In July 2004 authorities permitted resumption of the Geshe Lharampa examinations, the highest religious examination in the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, at Lhasa's Jokhang Temple for the first time in sixteen years. According to officials in the TAR, six monks in the TAR passed the Geshe Lharampa exam in 2004 and seven passed in 2005.

Government officials have stated that the patriotic education campaign, which began in 1996 and often consisted of intensive, weeks-long sessions conducted by outside work teams, ended in 2000. However, officials stated openly that monks and nuns undergo political education on a regular basis, generally less than four times a year, but occasionally more frequently, at their religious sites. Since primary responsibility for conducting political education shifted from government officials to monastery leaders, the form, content, and frequency of training at each monastery appeared to vary widely; however, conducting such training remained a requirement and had become a routine part of monastic management.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 3,395 Tibetan new arrivals approached UNHCR in Nepal during the year; 3,352 Tibetans departed for India, of whom 2,340 received UNHCR transit assistance, and 1,012 Tibetans left for India by their own means. Many Tibetans, particularly those from rural areas, continued to report difficulties obtaining passports. The application process was not transparent, and residents of different Tibetan areas reported obstacles ranging from bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption to denials based on the applicant's political activities or beliefs. Police in China have stated that passport regulations permit them to deny passports to those whose travel will "harm the national security and national interests."

Due in part to the difficulties faced by many Tibetans in obtaining passports, and in part to the difficulty many Chinese citizens of Tibetan ethnicity encountered obtaining entry visas for India, it was difficult for Tibetans to travel to India for religious purposes. The Government placed restrictions on the movement of Tibetans during sensitive anniversaries and events and increased controls over border areas at these times. There were reports of arbitrary detention that lasted 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. There were also reports that Government officials asked family members for bribes in exchange for the release of tortured returnees. Returned exiles reported that authorities pressured them not to discuss issues that the Government characterized as politically sensitive, such as the Dalai Lama.

In September 2005 Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that Chinese border forces opened fire on a group of fifty-one Tibetan asylum-seekers trying to travel to Nepal by way of Dhingri, in Shigatse Prefecture. All but three were taken into custody and their whereabouts remained unknown. The group included six children between the ages of ten and eleven, two nuns, and one monk. In November 2005 the Tibet Information Network (TIN) reported the detention in the TAR of fourteen Tibetans from Amdo who were attempting to travel to India via Nepal. Nevertheless, many Tibetans, including monks and nuns, visited India via third countries and returned to China after temporary stays. In 2006, there was a considerable increase in the number of Tibetans traveling from China to the Dalai Lama's Kolachakara ceremony in India. There were reports that Tibetans returning to China from the Kolachakara celebration were being monitored closely by authorities and indications that monks and nuns in some Tibetan areas in Sichuan were required to register upon their return.

During the Kolachakara ceremony the Dalai Lama appealed to Tibetans to protect wildlife by giving up traditional animal-skin-lined clothing. In response to and as a show of support for the Dalai Lama, groups of Tibetans in Eastern Tibetan areas, including Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu Provinces, held large ceremonies to burn animal pelts. Chinese authorities subsequently prohibited the public burnings and detained some participants, who were later released. Press reports noted that authorities in some areas pressured Tibetans in high-profile positions to continue wearing fur-trimmed traditional clothing.

In June 2006 authorities in Sichuan's Ganzi Prefecture reportedly initiated a political reeducation campaign for school children. Soldiers in uniform entered a school and said that Tibetans were not permitted to burn 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. TIN reported that seventeen students were detained for showing respect to the Dalai Lama.

The Karmapa Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kagyu sect and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, remained in exile following his 1999 flight to India. The Karmapa Lama stated that he fled because of the Government's controls on his movements and its refusal either to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or to allow his teachers to come to him. Visitors to Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Lama, noted that the population of monks remained small and the atmosphere was subdued.

The Government routinely asserted control over the process of identifying and educating reincarnated lamas. For example, the Government authorities closely supervised the current Reting Rinpoche, who is seven years old, and his education differed significantly from that of his predecessors.

The Government also strictly restricted contacts between reincarnate lamas and the outside world. For example, young incarnate lama Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa Lama in 1994, lived under government supervision at Nenang Monastery. Foreign delegations have been refused permission to visit him.

Government officials maintained that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama was not illegal 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. 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. The Government continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama. Photos of the "official" Panchen Lama, Gyaltsen Norbu, 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.

Nevertheless, the Government continued to insist that Communist Party members and senior employees adhere to the Party's code of atheism, and routine political training for cadres continued to promote atheism. Government officials confirmed that some Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officers were members of the Communist Party and that religious belief was incompatible with Party membership. This prohibition notwithstanding, some lower-level RAB officials practiced Buddhism.

Security was intensified during the Dalai Lama's birthday, sensitive anniversaries, and festival days in the TAR and in some other Tibetan areas. The prohibition on celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6 continued. The Government reportedly altered traditional dates of Tibetan festivals such as the Drepunb Shodon Festival, and in June, there were press reports that authorities in Amdo (Gansu Province) cancelled the Kalachakara religious ceremony that was scheduled to be held there on July 6. Tibetans in Amdo had reportedly received permission in 2005 to hold the ceremony in 2006. In June, some Tibetans were ordered not to visit temples and monasteries during the Saka Dawa Festival. Some government employees were told that they would lose their jobs or have their wages reduced if they disobeyed this order.

Travel restrictions for foreign visitors to and within the TAR were reported during the period covered by this report. The Government tightly controlled visits by foreign officials to religious sites in the TAR, and official foreign delegations had few opportunities to meet monks and nuns in Tibetan areas that were not previously approved by the local authorities.

In 2004 the Government also restricted access to the Serthar Buddhist Study Institute in Western Sichuan after the death of charismatic Tibetan leader, Jigme Phuntsog. Authorities also pressured monastic leaders to delay the search for Jigme Phuntsog's reincarnation. Also in 2004, Tibetan and Chinese intellectuals successfully petitioned to stop Han Chinese sportsman Zhang Jian from swimming across Lake Namtso in the TAR, a lake believed by many Tibetan Buddhists to be sacred.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government strictly controlled access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and it was difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. While the atmosphere for lay religious practice was less restrictive than in the recent past, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high, and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

In early October 2005 Ngawang Jangchub, a twenty-eight-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.

The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltsen Norbu, sixteen, the boy it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama's eleventh reincarnation. The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, seventeen, the boy recognized as the eleventh Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama in 1995 (when the boy was six years old), and his whereabouts were unknown. Government officials claimed that the boy 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 the boy to confirm his well-being have been refused.

Gyaltsen Norbu traveled to Lhasa and Ganden Monastery in October 2005 and gave head-touching blessings to monks. In December 2005, the Government celebrated the tenth anniversary of Gyaltsen Norbu's enthronement in his seat, the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse Prefecture in the TAR. During that ceremony, Gyaltsen Norbu performed a head-touching blessing for people in the monastery. Gyaltsen Norbu spoke before 1,000 international participants at the April 2006 World Buddhist Forum held in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, and called for national unity and patriotism, according to official press reports. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists continued to recognize Gendun Choekyi Nyima as the Panchen Lama.

Lama Chadrel Rinpoche, released in 2002 after six years and six months in prison for leaking information about the selection of the Panchen Lama, was reportedly still under house arrest near Lhasa. Government officials did not confirm his whereabouts and continued to refuse requests from the international community to meet with him.

Authorities in Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture continued to ignore international calls for an inquiry into the death of monk Nyima Dragpa, who allegedly died from se-

vere beatings while in government custody in October 2003. Officials did not provide any new information on Champa Chung, former assistant of Chadrel Rinpoche who was reportedly still held in custody after the expiration of his prison term in 1999.

In March 2005 the World Tibet Network News (WTN) reported that local authorities extended Tibetan Buddhist monk Jigme Gyatso's prison term from fifteen to seventeen years. He was arrested in Lhasa in 1996 for alleged "political activities."

In May 2005 according to the London-based Free Tibet Campaign, authorities in the Gansu Province detained three Tibetan nuns and two monks. Nuns Yonten Drolma, Tadrin Tsomo, and Choekyi Drolma and monks Jamyang Samdrub and Dargye Gyatso were reportedly arrested for distributing letters calling for Tibetan independence at a local monastery, market, and other areas. The Congressional Executive Commission on China Political Prisoner Database (CECC PPD) also listed monk Sherab detained as part of this group.

In mid-2005, Tibetan Buddhist monks Dzokar and Topden and layman Lobsang Tsering were reportedly released after serving a portion of a three-year jail term for putting up proindependence posters. They were arrested in September 2004 in Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture. Monks Dzokar and Topden reportedly returned to Chogri Monastery.

RFA reported in June 2005 that local authorities detained Jigme Dasang, a Tibetan monk from Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai Province. No charges were reported during the period covered by this report.

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; officials claimed no action had been taken against him. In another case of apparent preventative detention, state security detained a tailor, Sonam Gyalpo, in August 2005 on suspicion of endangering national security. In September 2005 Sonam Gyalpo was officially arrested on charges of separating the country and destroying national unity.

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.

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 Saga Dawa religious period on May 28. Kayi Doega and Sonam Lhamo, a nun, were reportedly detained in Kardze Prefecture on June 1 and June 2, respectively, on suspicion of organizing the leafleting.

Limited access to information about prisoners and prisons made it difficult to ascertain the number of Tibetan political prisoners or to assess the extent and severity of abuses. According to the Congressional Executive Commission on China Political Prisoner Database (CECC PPD), there were ninety-six Tibetan political prisoners and seventy-one of them monks and nuns. The CECC reported that the number of political prisoners declined to less than one-fifth the number ten years ago.

Approximately fifteen political prisoners remained in TAR Prison (also known as Drapchi Prison) in Lhasa, most serving sentences on the charge of "counterrevolution," which was dropped from the criminal law in 1997. Authorities have stated that acts previously prosecuted as counterrevolutionary crimes continue to be considered crimes under state security laws. According to the CECC PPD, almost half of Tibetan political prisoners were incarcerated in Lhasa and western Sichuan Province.

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, who was detained at Gutsa detention center upon arrest 1989 and then imprisoned in TAR Prison until 2004, reported that she was tortured by government authorities. Phuntsog Nyidrol had received a nine-year sentence for taking part in peaceful demonstrations supporting the Dalai Lama in 1989. In 1993 her sentence was extended to seventeen years after she and other nuns recorded songs about their devotion to Tibet and the Dalai Lama.

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. Nyidrol also stated that prison administrators deny family visits to religious prisoners as punishment.

Although Tibetan Buddhists in Tibetan areas outside of the TAR enjoy relatively greater freedom of worship than their coreligionists within the TAR, religious expression by Tibetan Buddhists outside the TAR has also at times resulted in detention and arrest.

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 on the same day despite reportedly giving assurances to senior diplomatic officials that both 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.

TIN reported in April 2006 that Gendun, a Tibetan monk and teacher of traditional monastic dance from Yulung Monastery in Qinghai was sentenced in January 2006 to four years in prison after he gave talks about Tibetan culture and history. Charges are unknown. Twenty other monks, students, and teachers were reportedly detained with Gendun in February 2005, but they were released soon afterwards.

The status of the following persons arrested from 2003 to 2005 remained unconfirmed at year's end: Five monks who were arrested in 2003 in Ngaba Prefecture in Sichuan Province and charged with alleged separatist activities; three monks from Kirti Monastery in Sichuan Province who were arrested in 2003 for posting pro-independence posters; two monks from Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture who were arrested in 2004 for displaying the Tibetan national flag; Choeden Rinzen, who was arrested in 2004 for possessing a Tibetan national flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama; Phutnsok Tsering in Magar Dhargyeling Monastery, who was arrested in 2005 for possessing a portrait of the Dalai Lama and writings on Tibetan nationalism; monk Sonam Phuntsog who was detained in 2004 in Sichuan Province on suspicion of being a Free Tibet activist; and five monks from Dakar Treldzong Monastery in Qinghai Province reportedly arrested in 2005 for publishing politically sensitive poems.

The Government did not provide any new information on the following reports: The whereabouts of Seopa Nagur, chief patron of the Kirti Monastic School that authorities closed in July 2003; 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 Government released some prisoners before the end of their sentences.

In January 2005, authorities released Tibetan monk Tashi Phuntsog, who served two years and nine months of his seven-year sentence. Tashi Phuntsog was detained in 2002 following the arrest of Tenzin Delek.

Lhasa orphanage owners Bangri Chogtrul Rinpoche (Jigme Tenzin Nyima) and Nyima Choedron, convicted in 2002 of "espionage and endangering state security," were given sentence reductions in March 2006. Bangri Chogrul's life sentence was commuted to a fixed term of nineteen years and then reduced by one year; his sentence was due to expire in 2021. Nyima Choedron's ten year sentence for splittism was reduced twice and was set to end in February 2007. She was released early on February 26, 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 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. The Christian population in Tibetan areas of China is extremely small. Some converts to Christianity may have encountered societal pressure.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas, using both focused external pressure regarding abuses and support for positive trends within the country. In regular exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, U.S. diplomatic personnel con-

sistently urged both Central Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom in Tibetan areas.

Prior to the March 2006 departure of nun Phuntsog Nyidrol, who was jailed for fifteen 15 years, numerous high-level U.S. officials including the ambassador and the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor raised concerns about her case in meetings with Chinese officials.

In November 2005 the U.N. Special Rapporteur for Torture visited Lhasa to meet with officials and visit two prisons.

Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination. U.S. officials in Washington, Beijing, and Chengdu pressed for specific information on Ngawang Jangchub, a twenty-eight-year-old Tibetan monk who was found dead in his room at the Drepung Monastery in early October 2005; and Sonam, a monk from the Potala Palace in Lhasa who was taken from the palace on August 21, 2005 in what NGOs alleged was a politically motivated detention. Officials asked for and were denied a meeting in Lhasa with Chadrel Rinpoche, reportedly under house arrest since 2002.

Tibetan Buddhist prisoners advocated for international access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima and urged the Chinese Government to pursue dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives.

U.S. diplomatic personnel stationed in the country 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.

U.S. development and exchange programs aim to strengthen Tibetan communities in China and preserve their environmental and cultural heritage. Both are inextricably linked to Tibet's Buddhist religious tradition. The U.S. 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.

TAIWAN

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

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

The American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Taiwan has an area of approximately 13,800 square miles and an estimated population of twenty-three million. While the authorities do not collect or independently verify statistics on religious affiliation, they maintain registration statistics voluntarily reported by religious organizations.

In April 2006 the Ministry of Interior (MOI) Religious Affairs Section reported that 35 percent of the people of Taiwan considered themselves Buddhist, 33 percent Taoist, 3.5 percent I Kuan Tao, 2.6 percent Protestant, 1.3 percent Roman Catholic, 1 percent Mi Le Da Dao, and 0.2 percent Sunni Muslim. Approximately 4 percent of the population followed traditional Chinese religions such as Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion), Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor Religion), and Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion). There also was a small number of Jews.

In addition, Confucian groups reported 26,700 members; Church of Scientology twenty thousand; Baha'i Faith 16 thousand; Hsuan Men Tsung 5 thousand; Zhonghua Sheng Chiao (Chinese Holy Religion) 3,200; Maitreya Emperor Religion 3 thousand; Ta I Chiao (Great Changes Religion) 1 thousand; Mahikari Religion 1 thousand; and Huang Chung (Yellow Middle) 1 thousand. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Secret Sect of Tibetan Lamaism (Mizong Buddhism), and the Unification Church were also registered but did not provide membership statistics. No new religious groups registered during the reporting period. Other Christian denominations included: Presbyterians, True Jesus, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. More

than 70 percent of the nearly half-million indigenous persons (aborigines) were Christian.

While the overwhelming majority of religious adherents were either Buddhist or Taoist, many people considered themselves to be both. Approximately 50 percent of the population regularly participated in some form of organized religious practice, and 81 percent adhered to some form of organized religion. According to the Religious Affairs Section of the MOI, an estimated 18 percent of the population was thought to be atheist.

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 included, but were not limited to, shamanism, ancestor worship, magic, ghosts and other spirits, and aspects of animism. Researchers have estimated that as much as 80 percent of the population believed in some form of traditional folk religion. Such folk religions may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions. The open, syncretistic nature of religion in Taiwan is such that many Buddhist and Taoist temples include Christian icons, including statues of Jesus and Mary, in the display of altar deities. There also may be an overlap between practitioners of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism with those of Falun Gong, which is registered as a civic rather than religious organization. Falun Gong, or Falun Dafa as it is sometimes called in Taiwan, is considered a spiritual movement and not a religion. The Chairman of the Taiwan Falun Dafa Society said membership in Taiwan had grown rapidly in recent years to approximately 500 thousand and continued to increase.

Religious beliefs cross political and geographic lines. Members of the political leadership practice various faiths. Regardless of political affiliation, every year tens of thousands of Buddhists and Taoists from Taiwan go to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on temple pilgrimages. Their mainland Chinese counterparts were also invited to participate in religious activities held in Taiwan, such as the annual festival of the Goddess of the Sea held during the third month of the lunar calendar. However, the number of mainland Chinese participants remained small because of travel restrictions between Taiwan and the PRC. After The PRC passed the Anti-Secession Law in March 2005, Taiwan's Executive Yuan asked local government officials, such as mayors and magistrates, to refrain from leading religious pilgrimages to the PRC. There were frequent cross-Strait religious exchanges over the past year but no reports of local officials leading such pilgrimages to the PRC.

Foreign missionary groups, including Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, were active in Taiwan.

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.

Although registration is not mandatory, twenty-six religious organizations have registered with the MOI Religious Affairs Section. Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the temple management law, the civic organizations law, or the chapter of the civil code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship may register with local authorities, many choose not to do so and operate as the personal property of their leaders. Registered organizations operate on a tax-free basis and are required to submit annual reports of their financial operations. In the past, concern over abuse of tax-free privileges or other financial misdeeds occasionally prompted the authorities to deny registration to new religious groups whose doctrines were not clear; however, there were no reports that the authorities sought to deny registration to new groups during the period covered by this report. The only ramification for nonregistration is the forfeiture of the tax advantages that are available for registered religious organizations.

In 2001 the cabinet submitted a bill to consolidate existing laws governing religious organizations. The bill has been pending in the Legislative Yuan for five years. It would enable religious groups to obtain official recognition if able to meet certain donation or membership thresholds. Some lawmakers have questioned whether a consolidated law is necessary and whether the proposed threshold requirements would hamper the interests of smaller religious groups.

Religious instruction is not permitted in public or private elementary, middle, or high schools accredited by the Ministry of Education. Religious organizations are permitted to operate schools, but religious instruction is not permitted in those schools. Schools not accredited by the ministry may provide religious instruction.

High schools may provide general courses in religious studies, and universities and research institutions have religious studies departments. Theological seminaries are operated by religious organizations.

The MOI promotes interfaith understanding among religious groups by sponsoring symposiums or by helping to defray the expenses of privately sponsored symposiums on religious issues. The MOI also publishes and updates an introduction to major religious beliefs and groups based on material provided by the groups. This introduction is also available on the Internet. In addition, the MOI holds annual ceremonies to honor religious groups that have made contributions to public service, social welfare, and to other activities promoting social harmony and serving the underprivileged.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Official policy and practice 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Relations among the various religious communities were generally amicable. The Taiwan Council for Religion and Peace, the China Religious Believers Association, and the Taiwan Religious Association are private organizations that promote greater understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions. These associations and various religious groups occasionally sponsor symposiums to promote mutual understanding. The Taiwan Conference on Religion and Peace sponsors summer seminars every year to help college students understand the practice of major religions in Taiwan. The 2005 seminar was held at the I Kuan Tao temple in Kaohsiung County, and more than 200 college students attended. The 2006 seminar was planned for September at a Tian Di Jiao temple in Taichung County.

Some religious groups had a tendency to take political positions. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan was active in politics, particularly in support of the pro-independence movement, and maintained contact with some elements of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party.

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. AIT was in frequent contact with representatives of human rights organizations and regularly meets with leaders of various religious communities.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 5,406 square miles and shares the island of Timor with Indonesia's Nusa Tenggara Timur Province. According to the most recent statistics available from the World Bank, the population of the territory was approximately 1,040,900. An overwhelming majority of the population was Catholic, and the Catholic Church was the dominant religious institution. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities were generally tolerant.

In a United Nations-administered consultation vote in 1999, an overwhelming majority of East Timorese voted against autonomy and, in effect, for independence from Indonesia. As a result, Indonesian forces began a violent withdrawal from East

Timor that forced approximately 200 thousand persons to flee across the border to West Timor. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) subsequently governed the country from October 1999 until independence in May 2002.

According to a 2005 report from the World Bank, 98 percent of the population was Catholic, 1 percent Protestant, and 1 percent Muslim. Most citizens also retained some vestiges of animistic beliefs and practices, which they have come to regard as more cultural than religious. The number of Protestants and Muslims has declined significantly since September 1999 because these groups were disproportionately represented among supporters of integration with Indonesia and among the Indonesian civil servants assigned to work in the province from other parts of Indonesia, many of whom left the country in 1999.

The Indonesian military forces formerly stationed in the country included a significant number of Protestants, who played a major role in establishing Protestant churches in the territory. Fewer than half of those congregations still existed after September 1999, and many Protestants were among those who remained in West Timor. The Assemblies of God was the largest and most active of the Protestant denominations. The country had a significant Muslim population during the Indonesian occupation, composed mostly of ethnic Malay immigrants from Indonesian islands. There also were 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 often were not. Only a few hundred of the latter remained in the country.

Domestic and foreign Catholic and Protestant missionary groups operated freely. Missionaries and other religious officials of all religions who come for religious purposes are exempt from paying visa fees.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the constitution became effective in 2002, the Government continued to enforce some Indonesian laws and UNTAET regulations not yet superseded by the constitution or national legislation. The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship for all persons and stipulates that no one shall be persecuted or discriminated against on the basis of religious convictions. The government generally protected this right, although there were reports of cases where the police force and legal system were either unresponsive or slow to respond to allegations of criminal acts against members of minority religious groups. Police cadets receive training in equal enforcement of the law and nondiscrimination, including religious nondiscrimination.

In October 2003 a law on immigration and asylum went into effect that includes two articles concerning religion. The first 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. 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. Missionaries and religious figures have been exempted.

There is no official state religion, although Catholicism remains dominant. Most designated public holidays are Catholic holy days, including Good Friday, Assumption Day, All Saints' Day, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

The question of religious education in public schools led to one of the most vigorous public debates since independence. In February 2005 the Government shifted religious education from the core curriculum and made it an after-school elective without state funding. Two Catholic bishops issued a pastoral note in response, stating that religious education should be part of the core curriculum, although parents should be able to exempt their children from such instruction. The note also asked the Government not to make major decisions on issues important to the Catholic Church without prior consultation. Government leaders responded that they would engage in dialogue with the church on religious education only after the new curriculum had been implemented. The bishops responded by organizing a mass demonstration that lasted almost three weeks and had approximately ten thousand participants, the largest public protest since independence. The standoff ended when the church and the Government signed an accord reinserting religious education into the core curriculum. The agreement also established a consultative body consisting of members of the Government and religious organizations. In June 2005 the

council held its first meeting to establish the framework for future consultations. Members of other religious groups were welcomed, and representatives of the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim communities attended.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, incidents of violence against certain religious groups continued to occur during the period covered by this report.

The strong and pervasive influence of the Catholic Church may sometimes affect the decisions of government officials. However, members of Protestant churches and the Islamic community also have some political influence and 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

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

The Catholic Church is the dominant religious institution, and its priests and bishops are accorded the highest respect in local society. Attitudes toward the small Protestant and Muslim communities generally are friendly in the capital of Dili, despite the past association of these groups with the occupying Indonesian forces. Outside of the capital, non-Catholic religious groups sometimes have been viewed with suspicion.

Some Muslim groups at times have been victims of harassment. In November and December 2004 about 300 ethnic Malay Muslims, who had been residing in Dili's main mosque, were deported for violation of immigration laws. Members of this group had been given several opportunities to relocate and normalize their residency status, but mosque leaders refused. The group was deported to Indonesian West Timor and reports indicated that many of them returned to their traditional homes in Java and Sumatra. These ethnic Malay Muslims feared integration into the community at large. Their occupation of the Dili mosque created tensions with Muslims of Arab descent. Despite some press reports to the contrary, religion was not at the core of the dispute. Rather, it stemmed chiefly from disagreements within the Muslim community about property rights and from the disputed citizenship claims of ethnic Malay residents.

At times non-Catholic Christian groups also have been harassed. According to Protestant leaders, individuals converting from Catholicism to Protestantism often were subject to harassment by family members and neighbors, and in some cases clergy and missionaries 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 stiff opposition from neighbors and local officials. Most Protestant leaders reported that Catholic Church officials and government authorities have been helpful in resolving disputes and conflicts when they occur.

During 2004, in the Maubara region, local residents reportedly became angry due to the number of persons Brazilian Protestant evangelists had converted from Catholicism. Individuals in the area complained that these evangelists had provided monetary loans and material goods to those who joined their church.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government regularly expresses support to 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country consists of more than three hundred islands, approximately 110 of which were inhabited; most of the population is concentrated on the main island of Viti Levu. The country has an area of 6,800 miles, and a population of 840,000. Estimates of religious affiliation were as follows: 58 percent of the population was Christian, 30 percent Hindu, and 7 percent Muslim. The largest Christian denomination was the Methodist Church, which claimed approximately 218,000 members. Other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church also had significant followings. The Methodist Church was supported by the majority of the country's chiefs and remained influential in the ethnic Fijian community, particularly in rural areas. There also were a small number of active nondenominational Christian groups.

Religion ran largely along ethnic lines. Most indigenous Fijians, who constituted approximately 54 percent of the population, were Christian. Most Indo-Fijians, who accounted for an estimated 38 percent, practiced Hinduism, while approximately 20 percent of this community followed Islam. In addition an estimated 6 percent of Indo-Fijians were Christian. Other ethnic communities include Chinese, Rotumans, Europeans, and other Pacific Islanders. Approximately 60 percent of the Chinese community practiced Christianity, and approximately 4 percent adhered to Confucianism. The European community was predominantly Christian.

Hindu and Muslim communities maintained a number of active religious and cultural organizations.

Numerous Christian missionary organizations were nationally and regionally active in social welfare, health, and education. Many major Christian denominations, most notably the Methodist Church, had missionaries in the country. The missionaries operated numerous religious schools, including colleges, not subsidized by the Government.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

Citizens celebrated major observances of the three predominant religions as national holidays, including Christmas, Easter, Diwali, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

The Government partly 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. Some Methodist Church authorities and allied political groups continued to advocate for the establishment of a Christian state, but the new leadership of the Methodist Church somewhat moderated the expression of strong nationalist sympathies endorsed by the previous leadership.

In December 2005 the Government refused entry to the leader of the Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, following opposition expressed by religious organizations including the Fiji Council of Churches, an umbrella organization of nine mainstream Christian denominations, and others. A Ministry of Home Affairs and

Immigration spokesperson said Moon's doctrines were "misleading, repugnant, and divisive and would affect the peace, good order, public safety, and public morality of the Fiji Islands." The refusal to permit Moon's entry contrasted with the Government's welcoming attitude during the same period toward an American televangelist, over the protests of some religious denominations.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. However, in 2005 incidents of sacrilege increased for the third year in a row. Of the fifty incidents reported, most (72 percent) consisted of unidentified persons robbing and desecrating Hindu temples. There were ten acts of desecration of churches and four of mosques. Police surmised that these attacks had more to do with theft than with religious intolerance. Several Hindu members of Parliament alleged that the increasing attacks on Hindu temples were examples of a lack of societal respect for the Hindu religion. They called on law enforcement authorities to take more stringent action to prevent attacks and to identify and punish perpetrators.

SECTION IV. U.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. The embassy continued to make religious freedom an important part of its effort to promote democracy and human rights.

INDONESIA

The constitution provides for "all persons the right to worship according to his or her own religion or belief" and states that "the nation is based upon belief in one supreme God." While the Government generally respected freedom of religion, restrictions continued on some 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.

There was little change in respect for religious freedom during the period covered by the report. Most of the population enjoyed a high degree of religious freedom. Confucians enjoyed a higher degree of religious freedom after concerned government offices recognized Confucianism as an official religion in early 2006; however, with the addition of Confucianism, the Government recognizes only six major religions. Atheists or persons of nonrecognized faiths frequently experienced 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 thirty-four small unlicensed churches and at least seven Ahmadiyya complexes to close in separate incidents over the course of the reporting period. Some government officials and mass Muslim organizations rejected the Ahmadiyya interpretation of Islam resulting in the discrimination and abuse of its followers. Religiously-motivated violence and vigilante acts in Maluku and North Maluku declined significantly, although, as in past years, 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 diffuse tensions in conflict areas, particularly in Central Sulawesi and the Moluccas. While Aceh remained the only province authorized to implement Islamic law, or Shari'a, regencies (local districts) outside of Aceh promulgated local laws implementing elements of Shari'a.

In July 2005 the Council of Ulemas (MUI) issued eleven new fatwas (religious decrees) including one that renewed a 1980 fatwa that banned Ahmadiyya. The Government formed the MUI in 1975 as the state's highest Islamic authority. Although the Government also funds and appoints MUI's members, MUI is not a government body. It's edicts, or fatwas, are designed to be moral guiding principles for Muslims

and, although they are not legally binding, society and the Government seriously consider MUI opinions when making decisions or drafting legislation. The July 2005 fatwas influenced some societal discrimination 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 covers an area of approximately 1.8 million square miles (0.7 million square miles landmass) and had a population estimated at 241 million.

The Indonesian Central Statistic Bureau (BPS) conducts a census every ten years. The latest data available, from 2000, drew on 201,241,999 survey responses; the BPS estimated that the census missed 4.6 million persons. According to the BPS report, 88.2 percent of the population described themselves as Muslim, 5.9 percent Protestant, 3.1 percent Catholic, 1.8 percent Hindu, 0.8 percent Buddhist, and 0.2 percent "other," including traditional indigenous religions, other Christian groups, and Jewish. The country's religious composition remained a politically charged issue, and some Christians, Hindus, and members of other minority faiths argued that the census undercounted non-Muslims. The Government does not recognize atheism.

Most Muslims in the country follow the Sunni interpretation of Islam: The Shi'a headquarters in Jakarta estimated there were one to three million Shi'a practitioners nationwide. In general the mainstream Muslim community follows two orientations: "Modernists," who closely adhere to scriptural orthodox theology while embracing modern learning and modern concepts; and predominantly Javanese "traditionalists," who often follow charismatic religious scholars and organize around Islamic boarding schools. The leading "modernist" social organization, Muhammadiyah, claimed approximately thirty million followers, while the largest "traditionalist" social organization, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), claimed forty million.

Smaller Islamic organizations covered a broad range of doctrinal orientations. At one end of the ideological spectrum lay the Liberal Islam Network, which promotes an individual interpretation of doctrine. At the other end existed groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), which advocates a pan-Islamic caliphate, and the Indonesian Mujahidin Council (MMI), which advocates implementation of Shari'a as a precursor to an Islamic state. Many other organizations fell between these poles, including multimillion member Islamic organizations such as the Sulawesi-based al-Khairaat.

Separate from the country's dominant Sunni Islam population, a small minority of people subscribed to the Ahmadiyya interpretation of Islam. There were 242 Ahmadiyya branches throughout the country.

Small numbers of other messianic Islamic groups exist, including the Malaysian-affiliated Darul Arqam, the syncretist Indonesian Jamaah Salamulla (also called the Salamulla Congregation), and the Indonesian Islamic Propagation Institute (LDII).

Internal migration altered the demographic makeup over the past three decades, increasing the percentage of Muslims in eastern parts of the country that were formerly predominantly Christian. Although in previous years the government-sponsored transmigration from heavily populated Java and Madura to less populated areas contributed to the increase in the Muslim population in resettlement areas, most recent Muslim migration was apparently spontaneous. The economic and political consequences of such migration contributed to religious conflicts in Maluku and Central Sulawesi and to a lesser extent in Papua.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs estimated 6,501,680 Hindus lived in the country. The Hindu association Parishada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI) claimed the Hindu population is much larger. Hindus accounted for almost 90 percent of the population in Bali. Balinese Hinduism developed various local characteristics that distinguish it from Hinduism as practiced on the Indian subcontinent. Hindu minorities (called "Keharingan") also reside in Central and East Kalimantan, the city of Medan (North Sumatra), South and Central Sulawesi, and Lombok (West Nusa Tenggara). Some of these Hindus left Bali as part of the Government's transmigration program. Hindu groups such as Hare Krishna and followers of the Indian spiritual leader Sai Baba also are present, although in small numbers.

Some indigenous faiths, including the "Naurus" on Seram Island in Maluku Province, incorporated Hindu beliefs. The Naurus combine Hindu and animist beliefs, and many also adopted some Protestant principles. The Tamil community in Medan represented another important concentration of Hindus. North Sumatra had a Sikh population of more than ten thousand, most residing in Pematang Siantar or

Medan. The population formed part of the North Sumatra Punjabi community, otherwise primarily Hindu. Eight Sikh gurdwaras (temples) are located in North Sumatra. Sikhs, however, were not allowed to identify themselves as such on their identity cards or birth or marriage certificates, and therefore most registered as "Hindu."

Among Buddhists, approximately 60 percent followed the Mahayana school, Theravada followers accounted for 30 percent, and the remaining 10 percent belonged to the Tantrayana, Tridharma, Kasogatan, Nichiren, and Maitreya schools. According to the Young Generation of Indonesian Buddhists (GMBI), most adherents lived in Java, Bali, Lampung, West Kalimantan, the Riau islands, and Jakarta; ethnic Chinese made up an estimated 60 percent of the country's Buddhists. Two major Buddhist social organizations exist, the Indonesian Great Sangha Conference (KASI) and the Indonesian Buddhist Council (WALUBI), and many adherents associate themselves with one or the other.

The number of adherents of Confucianism remained unclear because at the time of the national census in 2000 respondents were not allowed to identify themselves as Confucian. The percentage of practicing Confucians may have increased after the Government lifted restrictions related to the faith 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 again include Confucian as a census category.

An estimated twenty million people in Java, Kalimantan, and Papua practiced animism and other types of traditional belief systems termed "Aliran Kepercayaan." Many of those who practice Kepercayaan described it as more of a meditation-based spiritual path than a religion. Some animists combined their beliefs with one of the government-recognized religions.

Descendants of Iraqi and Armenian Jews, who came to the country more than a century ago to trade spices, still practiced their faith in Surabaya. They have a small inactive synagogue. A small Jewish community also existed in Jakarta.

The Baha'i community reported that it had thousands of members in the country, but there were no reliable figures available.

Falun Dafa (also known as Falun Gong) representatives claimed the group, which considers itself a spiritual organization instead of a religion, has two thousand to three thousand followers in the country, nearly half of whom lived in Yogyakarta, Bali, and Medan.

No data existed on the religious affiliations of foreign nationals and immigrants.

Approximately 175 foreign missionaries, primarily Christian, operated in the country. Many worked in Papua, Kalimantan, and other areas with large numbers of animists.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides "all persons the right to worship according to their own religion or belief" and states that "the nation is based upon belief in one supreme God." Despite its overwhelming Muslim majority, Indonesia is not an Islamic state. Over the past fifty years, many Islamic groups sporadically sought to establish an Islamic state, but the country's mainstream Muslim community has rejected the idea. An Islamic state is also incompatible with the country's founding ideology, Pancasila. The Government generally respected religious freedom; however, some restrictions existed on certain types of religious activity and on unrecognized religions. The Government sometimes tolerated extremist groups that used violence and intimidation against religious groups, and it often failed to punish perpetrators of such violence.

The Government requires officially recognized religions to comply with Ministry of Religious Affairs and other ministerial directives, such as the Revised Regulation on Building Houses of Worship (2006), Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions in Indonesia (1978), and the Guidelines for the Propagation of Religion (1978).

The Government, in consultation with major religious groups, revised the 1969 Joint Ministerial Decree on the Construction of Houses of Worship in 2006 in response to militant groups' use of the 1969 decree to force the closure of unregistered churches. The stated goal of the revision was to make it easier to open new houses of worship. The revised decree requires religious groups that want to build a new house of worship to obtain the signatures of at least ninety congregation members and sixty persons of other faiths in the community that support the establishment and approval from the local religious affairs office. Some religious groups com-

plained that the revised decree made it too difficult to establish a house of worship, while others argued that the increased clarity of the new decree would improve the situation by diminishing conflicting interpretations of the 1969 decree. The Guidelines for Overseas Aid to Religious Institutions requires domestic religious organizations to obtain approval from the Ministry of Religion for funding received 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 five years in prison. This act was used to convict three Christian women who were convicted of trying to convert Muslim children.

Article 156 of the criminal code makes spreading hatred, heresy, and blasphemy punishable up to five years in jail. Although the law applies to all officially recognized religions, it is most often applied to cases involving Islam. This law was used in a number of cases during the reporting period.

The question of implementing Shari'a generated controversy and concern during the period covered by this report. Aceh remained the only province within the country in which the central Government specifically authorized Shari'a; however, Parliament reviewed a highly controversial draft antipornography bill that would outlaw displaying "sensual body parts," kissing in public, and any writings, art, recordings, or broadcasts with sexually explicit content, all of which is broadly defined. The draft bill sparked a heated national debate and led to large demonstrations (both for and against).Opponents of the bill said that it was an attempt by proponents of Shari'a law to implement Shari'a through the "back door." At the end of the reporting period, the bill was still under review.

The Government's jurisdiction over religious matters did not prevent approximately thirty regencies and municipalities across the country from promulgating Shari'a-inspired regulations at the local level. Fifty-six parliament members signed a petition requesting a national review of Shari'a-based local laws to test their accordance with the constitution but later dropped their petition. Press reports quoted Muhammad Ma'ruf, minister of home affairs, as stating governors should be responsible for reviewing local laws; however, at the end of the reporting period, neither the central Government nor local governments had not reviewed any Shari'a-inspired regulations.

In 2003 Presidential Decree 11/2003 formally established Shari'a courts in Aceh by renaming the existing religious courts while retaining their infrastructure, jurisdiction, and staff. The judges of these new Shari'a courts stated that they would focus on cases related to the "performance of Islamic duties in daily life." Sofyan Saleh, head of the Islamic Law Supreme Court, reported that immediately after the December 2004 tsunami, Aceh's Shari'a courts had a docket of approximately six thousand cases, two-thirds of which dealt with inheritance or other property-related matters. Family law cases dramatically decreased, but the focus on property matters continued during the reporting period.

According to press reports, during the reporting period, the Government caned at least eighty-four persons in Aceh for violation of Shari'a: Thirteen for being alone with persons of the opposite sex who were not blood relatives, seventeen for consuming alcohol, and fifty-four for gambling. Public canings sometimes drew crowds in the thousands. The Government sentenced some persons to up to forty lashings; some persons subsequently required hospitalization. Unlike during the last reporting period, those the Government caned did not have to serve an additional common law sentence.

Also in Aceh, efforts to educate the public about Shari'a included a high-profile public education campaign in the weeks leading up to the fasting month of Ramadan (October 2005). Shopkeepers faced the possibility of six lashes if they did not close their businesses for midday prayers during Ramadan. The program lasted only a few weeks and applied only to Muslims. Aceh Province deployed hundreds of Shari'a police to enforce Shari'a. They worked jointly with the civil police to investigate and prosecute cases of Shari'a law violation. 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. When popular bands Radja and Ratu played a joint concert in the city of Banda Aceh in March 2006, the Government erected partitions to separate male and female concertgoers but did not punish fans who ignored the barriers.

Between 2002 and 2005 Bulukumba Regency in South Sulawesi promulgated four local laws implementing elements of Shari'a for all Muslims in the regency. The local laws enforced Islamic dress, antialcohol and narcotics measures, with caning

as a form of punishment. The Bulukumba regent claimed that 100 percent of Muslim women wore headscarves. In Padang, West Sumatra, the mayor instructed all Muslim women to wear a headscarf; local authorities enforced this requirement. The regulations did not apply to non-Muslims, nor were they enforced in the beach area frequented by international tourists.

The Madura Regency of Pamekasan established a local Shari'a implementation committee in 2003 calling for the wearing of Muslim attire by Muslim civil servants and the cessation of both public and work activities during the call to prayer. On December 31, 2005, Maros Regency in South Sulawesi, also passed three local laws similar to those in Bulukumba Regency. In 2006 the mayor of Tangerang in Banten Province passed a ban on 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 her attitude, behavior, or dress and places the burden on suspected women to prove their innocence. Tangerang tried thirty-one women as prostitutes, including a married mother of two found waiting at a bus stop during the early evening. Advocacy groups challenged the constitutionality of Tangerang's regulation.

Divorce remained a legal option available to members of all religions, but Muslims who wished to seek divorce generally had to turn to the Islam-based family court system, while non-Muslims obtained a divorce through the national court system. Marriage law for Muslims draws from Shari'a and allows a man to have up to four wives, provided that he can provide equally for each of the wives. For a man to take a second, third, or fourth wife, he must obtain court permission and the consent of the first wife, conditions not always met in practice. Women reportedly found it difficult to refuse, and Islamic women's groups divided over whether the system needed revision. In divorce cases, women often bore a heavier evidentiary burden than men, especially in the Islam-based family court system. The law requires courts to oblige the former husband to provide alimony or its equivalent, but no enforcement mechanism existed, and divorced women rarely received such support. No discussion took place during the reporting period of an Islamic family law draft that aimed to enhance the legal rights of Muslim women in many aspects of marriage and divorce law. Minister of Religious Affairs M. Maftuh Basyuni shelved the draft in 2004.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs extends official status to six faiths: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and as of January 2006, Confucianism. In previous years, the ministry did not offer services to Confucianism. Religious organizations other than the six recognized faiths can register with the Government, but only with the Ministry for Culture and Tourism and only as social organizations. This restricts certain religious activities. Unregistered religious groups do not have the right to establish a house of worship and have administrative difficulties with identity cards and registering marriages and births.

The Government permits the practice of the indigenous belief system of Kepercayaan, as a cultural manifestation, not a religion. Followers of "Aliran Kepercayaan" must register with the Ministry of Education's Department of Education. Some religious minorities whose activities the Government had banned in the past, such as those of the Rosicrucians, were allowed to operate openly. The national Government did not formally ban Ahmadiyya activities, but some local governments did. Despite the central Government's jurisdiction over religious affairs, the administration did not take a clear position on the bans.

Some Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist holy days are national holidays. Muslim holy days celebrated 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 are Christmas, Good Friday, and the Ascension of Christ. Three other national holidays are the Hindu holiday Nyepi, the Buddhist holiday Waisak, and Chinese New Year, celebrated by Confucians and other Chinese. In Bali all Hindu holy days are regional holidays, and public servants and others 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 types of entertainment establishments. A Jakarta decree 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 operated for up to four hours per night. Some members of minority faiths, as well as some Muslims, felt these orders infringed on their rights. Enforcement varied.

The Government did not take any steps to implement controversial provisions of the 2003 education law that required private elementary and secondary schools to provide students with religious instruction in their own faith. Under preceding laws, students had to choose religious instruction from five types of classes, representing only Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

During the period covered by this report, a number of government officials and prominent religious and political leaders interacted with interfaith groups, including the Society for Inter-religious Dialog (MADIA), the Indonesian Anti-Discrimination Movement (GANDI), the Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP), the Indonesian Committee on Religion and Peace (also ICRP), the Institute for Interfaith Dialog (Interfidei), and National People's Solidarity (Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa).

The Government of the province of North Sumatra sponsored an organization named FORKALA that united representatives of all recognized religious faiths. The organization sought interfaith dialogue as a way of avoiding antireligious conflict and violence. FORKALA sent out interfaith teams to speak to all parties when it received a complaint.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Certain policies, laws, and official actions restricted religious freedom, and the Government sometimes tolerated discrimination against and the abuse of religious groups by private actors.

In 1980 the Indonesian Council of Ulamas (MUI) issued a "fatwa" (a nonlegal, nonbinding but influential opinion issued by Islamic religious leaders) declaring that Ahmadiyya did not form a legitimate part of Islam. Influenced by the fatwa, in 1984 the Religious Affairs Ministry issued a circular banning the Ahmadiyya from disseminating their teachings in Indonesia. In 2003 the Home Affairs Ministry affirmed Ahmadiyya's legal recognition. However, on July 28, 2005, the MUI renewed the 1980 fatwa. The press quoted the Minister of Religion M. Maftuh Basyuni in February as stating that Ahmadiyya members should either form a new religion or come back into the fold of mainstream Islam.

Some local governments banned Ahmadiyya activities after militant groups attacked Ahmadiyya mosques, homes, and other private property. In July 2005 the Bogor regency issued a decree prohibiting Ahmadiyya's activities. In September, following mob attacks on an Ahmadiyya compound, the CirnjurCianjur Regency formally banned all Ahmadiyya activities. In October 2005 the regional representative office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in West Nusa Tenggara issued a ban on Ahmadiyya. This action followed existing bans in West Lombok (2001) and East Lombok (1983). Local governments claimed such bans sought to keep the peace or protect Ahmadiyya from further violence, but Ahmadiyya and their supporters argued that the local governments punished the victims and rewarded the perpetrators. The central Government condemned the use of violence; however, despite its jurisdiction over religious matters, the central Government did not speak out against or formally review the bans.

The civil registration system continued to restrict religious freedom of persons who did not belong to the six recognized faiths; animists, Baha'is, and members of other small minority faiths found it impossible to register marriages or births. Couples prevented from registering their marriage or the birth of their child in accordance with their faiths had to either convert to one of the recognized faiths or misrepresent 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.

The first tenet of the country's national ideology, Pancasila, declares belief in one supreme God. The Government does not recognize atheism.

Religious groups and social organizations must obtain permits to hold religious concerts or other public events. The Government usually granted the permits in an unbiased manner unless a concern existed that the activity could anger members of another faith in the area.

The Government bans proselytizing, arguing that such activity, especially in areas heavily dominated by members of another religion, could prove disruptive. The Ministries of Religion and Home Affairs in 1979 issued a joint decree prohibiting members of one religion from trying to convert members of other faiths. During this reporting period, the Child Protection Law was used to prosecute individuals accused of attempting to convert Muslim children to Christianity.

Foreign religious organizations must obtain permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to provide any type of assistance (in-kind, personnel, and financial) to religious groups in the country. Although the Government generally did not enforce this requirement, some Christian groups stated that the Government applied it more frequently to minority groups than to mainstream Muslim groups.

Foreign missionaries must obtain religious worker visas, which some described as difficult to obtain or extend. The administrative requirements for religious worker visas prove more onerous than for other visa categories. They require not only approval from each office of the Department of Religion from the local to the national

level but also statistical information on the number of followers of the religion in the community and a statement confirming that the applicant will work no more than two years in the country before replacement by a local citizen. Foreign missionaries 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.

Religious speeches can take place if delivered to coreligionists and are 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. At times, the Government restricted religious speech.

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 Government had a monopoly on organizing the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Government requires all adult citizens to carry a National Identity Card (KTP), which identifies, among other things, the holder's religion. Members of faiths not recognized by the Government generally cannot obtain KTPs unless they incorrectly identify themselves as a member of a recognized religion. During the period covered by this report, some Civil Registry officials rejected applications submitted by members of unrecognized faiths, while others accepted applications but issued KTPs that inaccurately reflected the applicants' religion. Some animists received KTPs that listed their religion as Islam. Many Sikhs register as Hindu because the Government does not officially recognize their religion. Until February 2006 when the Government began providing administrative services to Confucians, some Confucians received Buddhist KTPs. Even some Protestants and Catholics received KTPs listing them as Muslims. It appears that Civil Registry staff used Islam as the "default" category for many members of unrecognized faiths. Islam remained the only recognized religion that could be claimed without proof and was administratively the least burdensome.

Some citizens without a KTP had difficulty finding work. Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious advocacy groups continued to urge the Government to delete the religion category from KTPs.

Government employees must swear allegiance to the nation and to the national ideology, Pancasila, which includes belief in one supreme God.

The law does not discriminate against any religious group in employment, education, housing, or health care; however, some Christians and members of other religious minority groups believed they often were excluded from prime civil service postings and graduate student positions at public universities.

Men and women of different religions faced serious 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.

The armed forces provide religious facilities and programs, including services and prayer meetings, at all major housing complexes for servicemen and servicewomen who practice one of the major 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 five religions.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During this reporting period certain policies, laws, and official actions restricted the religious freedom of the Ahmadiyya community. While mass Islamic organizations condemned the use of violence, the Government implicitly tolerated discrimination and abuse by some societal members toward the Ahmadiyya by remaining silent on both their legal status and local bans.

Despite a heavy police presence during two separate attacks on an Ahmadiyya Congregation in West Java in July 2005, police made no arrests. A local ban was subsequently passed against the Ahmadiyya, and they were prevented from using their complex. Following two separate incidents in February and March 2006 in which mobs burned or destroyed dozens of Ahmadiyya homes in Lombok, 182 residents began living in government-provided barracks with no viable plan for their return or resettlement.

After the Government promulgated the Regulation on Building Houses of Worship in 2006, a revision of the 1969 decree, militant groups forcibly closed two churches without police intervention despite a two-year grace period contained in the revised regulation for houses of worship to obtain permits per the new requirements. At the end of the reporting period, these churches remained closed. Another twenty churches, closed under pressure from militant groups the promulgation of the revised decree, also remain closed. Though often present, police almost never 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 groups, but at the end of the reporting period, there were no specific reports of action.

During this reporting period, the Government also continued to explicitly and implicitly restrict the religious freedom of groups associated with forms of Islam viewed as outside the mainstream.

In October 2005 the regional representative office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in West Nusa Tenggara issued a ban on thirteen religious sects, including Ahmadiyya, Jehovah's Witness, Hari Krishna, and nine forms of traditional beliefs (aliran kepercayaan), as being deviations of Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism.

On December 28, 2005, police arrested Lia Eden, leader of Jamaah Alamulla, and evacuated twenty of her followers to avoid violence during a riot demanding closure of the small sect. On June 29, 2006, a Jakarta district court sentenced Eden to two years in prison for denigrating a religion. The few adherents of Jamaah Alamulla believe that the angel Gabriel speaks through Eden and combine elements of Christianity and Islam. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) issued an edict in 1997, in which Lia Eden's sect was declared deviant.

Followers of a small sect loosely based on Islam clashed with police in October 2005 in a remote village outside Palu, Central Sulawesi. Police made several attempts to negotiate with the charismatic leader of the group, known by his followers as "Madi," to come to the police station and respond to complaints that he threatened local villagers and prevented some from fasting and praying during Ramadan. Three policemen and two sect members died in the clash; sect members reportedly held two police officers hostage but later released them. Prosecutors in January 2006 called for the death penalty for five sect members being tried by local courts.

Police arrested three women from the Christian Church of Camp David (GKKD) in Indramayu, West Java, and in September 2005 the court sentenced them to three years in jail under the Child Protection Law for allegedly attempting to convert Muslim children to Christianity. Prosecutors charged the women after community members complained the women used Christian youth recreation programs to proselytize Muslim children. The women claimed that family members gave permission for their children to attend the event. Witnesses failed to support the women during the trial, however, because of alleged intimidation from the community. At the time of this report the defendants' case remained on appeal at the Supreme Court.

In November 2005 local police detained a foreign citizen and an Indonesian associated with a Christian working on a humanitarian dam building project in a known conservative Muslim area 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 ire on the part of leaders and their communities that had not received similar projects. Prosecutors charged the foreign citizen with immigration violations, and the court sentenced him to five months in prison; prosecutors charged the Indonesian citizen, who continued to publicly profess a nontraditional version of Islam, with denigrating a religion and the court sentenced him to two and a half years in prison.

During this reporting period, there were incidents in which the Government arrested and charged individuals with heresy, blasphemy, and insulting Islam

In August 2005 East Java's Malang District Court sentenced Muhammad Yusman Roy to two years in jail for reciting Muslim prayers in the Indonesian language, which MUI said tarnished the purity of Arabic-based Islam.

In September 2005 an East Java court sentenced each of six drug and cancer treatment counselors to five years in jail and another to three years in jail for violating key precepts of Islam. A local MUI edict characterized their rehabilitation center's teachings as heretical. Police arrested the counselors while they tried to defend themselves from hundreds of persons who raided the center's headquarters.

In January 2006 the Government charged Sumardi Tappaya, a Muslim high school religious teacher on Sulawesi Island, for heresy, a crime punishable by up to five years in prison. Police jailed Tappay after a relative accussed him of whistling during prayers. The local MUI declared the whistling as deviant. On June 28 the Polewali State Court sentenced Sumardi to six months in jail.

The Government restricted religious speech by arresting individuals accused of criticizing Islam or Muslims.

In June 2005, 2,000 persons protested against an opinion article, entitled "Islam, A Failed Religion," written by a lecturer at the Muhammadiyah University in Palu. The article, among other things, highlighted the spread of corruption in the country. Police criminally charged the writer for heresy and held him for 5 days before placing him on house arrest.

In August 2005 police dropped the case against a cartoonist and a newspaper editor in Medan, North Sumatra, for lack of evidence. Police initially arrested them in October 2004 for running a caricature suggesting Muslims habitually support corrupt political candidates.

On March 6 and 7, 2006, Falun Dafa (also known as Falun Gong) members staged a two-day hunger strike in front of the Chinese embassy in protest of an attack against a Falun Dafa journalist. 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, not because the activists were Falun Dafa members; distribution of Communist literature remains illegal. On April 26, 2006, unknown persons physically attacked a Falun Dafa member in Jakarta who sought to start a demonstration together with a fellow member. Police did not investigate the attack.

The press reported that in May 2006 the Banyuwangi Regional Legislature voted to oust Banyuwangi Regent Ratna Ani Lestari from office. Those in favor of the ouster accused Ratna, a Muslim by birth, of blaspheming Islam for allegedly practicing a different religion from the one stated on her identity card. They also accused her of underfunding Islamic boarding schools in the area, improperly using Quranic verses in election materials, and including the price of pork in the regional budget. Ratna's supporters said she was the target of a religiously motivated smear campaign because of her marriage to a Hindu.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor United States 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, published articles with anti-Semitic statements and themes. It made assertions suggesting the existence of covert conspiratorial "Zionist" activities ongoing in the country. A CD produced by Trustco Multimedia, a commercial entity, containing political material on the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which holds 8 percent of the country's parliamentary seats, also contained an anti-Semitic game entitled "Shoot the Jews." PKS subsequently asked Trustco Multimedia to pull the CD from consumer shelves.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

Religiously motivated terrorists active in the region carried out one major attack in the country during the period covered by this report. On October 1, 2005, three suicide bombers from the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terror group killed twenty-two persons and injured more than one hundred in the tourist areas of Kuta and Jimbaran in Bali. The death penalty trials of suspects Mohamad Cholili (alias Yahya), Abdul Aziz (alias Jafar), Dwi Widianto (alias Wiwid), and Anif Solchanudin (alias Pendek) were ongoing at the end of this reporting period.

Some Muslims criticized the arrest and prosecution of Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, the head of the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) terrorist group, who was found guilty and sentenced to thirty months in jail for involvement in the 2002 Bali bombings and acquitted of more serious terrorism charges. During his imprisonment, the Government, in accordance with national law, granted Ba'asyir one remission for good behavior. On June 14, 2006, he was released from prison after serving twenty-six months.

The Government successfully prosecuted more than fifty-two religiously motivated terrorists and their associates during the period covered by this report. Those prosecuted not only included members of JI but also other groups of terrorists and religious extremists. The Government successfully prosecuted six persons for the September 2004 suicide attack on the Australian Embassy that killed ten persons and injured more than one hundred. The court sentenced Rois and Ahmad Hasan to death, Saipul Bahri to ten years in jail, and the three other participants to between three and seven years in jail. Local courts in Maluku continued to aggressively try cases of those allegedly responsible for violence in the province. During the reporting period, the Maluku courts convicted thirty-two persons under the antiterrorism

law for involvement in extremist violence in the province. Sentences ranged from five years to life in prison.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In a 2006 speech celebrating Chinese New Year, the President promised that the Government would now provide services to Confucians as a member of an officially recognized religion, and in early 2006 he instructed the Religious Affairs and Home Affairs ministries to carry out his promise. As a result, Confucians could obtain identity cards that reflected their religious affiliation and register Confucian marriages and births.

The Government organized and facilitated an international and interfaith dialogue in the Philippines on March 14, 2006. Representatives from the ten member states of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) attended as well as representatives from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, and East Timor.

Local police in Central Sulawesi were more active in punishing those allegedly involved in violence that may be related to interreligious strife. In June 2005 police arrested eighteen suspects in the May 28, 2005, Tentena bombing. The head of Poso prison, Hasman, was also arrested, but police subsequently released Hasman and all other suspects for lack of evidence. In Central Sulawesi, police arrested Papa Siti, suspected in the 2004 shooting of prosecutor Ferry Silalahi, on July 17, 2005, in Malino village of Tojo Una-Una Regency. On March 15, 2006, Central Sulawesi police detained Andi Makasau, the alleged mastermind of a series of armed robberies, fatal shootings, and bombings in the province, along with six other persons allegedly involved in violence there. The case remained ongoing. On May 7, 2006, police arrested five men in connection with acts of terrorism and other violent crimes in Central Sulawesi.

Local police in Central Sulawesi continued to protect local churches and other prayer houses during religious services.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

In general Muslims remained tolerant and had a pluralistic outlook; however, in January 2006 the Indonesia Survey Institute (LSI) concluded that conservatism was on the rise. In a nationwide survey, 40 percent approved of stoning to death adulterers, 34 percent did not want another female president, and 40 percent found polygamy acceptable.

Economic tensions between local or native peoples, predominantly non-Muslim, and more recent migrants, predominantly Muslim, played a significant role in incidents of interreligious and interethnic violence in Central Sulawesi, Papua, and Kalimantan.

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. It remained unclear whether these incidents arose from interreligious conflict, criminal motives, or a combination of the two. On October 29, 2005, unidentified attackers ambushed and beheaded three Christian schoolgirls near Poso, Central Sulawesi; police investigation into the killings was ongoing. Days after the beheading, unidentified individuals shot and killed two teenage girls, one Muslim and one Christian, at a bus stop in Poso, in what may have been a revenge attack. That same week, attackers shot and injured a Palu-area university professor and his wife. On December 31, unknown perpetrators bombed a Palu Market selling pork, killing seven persons and injuring more than fifty. Police arrested one suspect but later released him due to lack of evidence. On May 7, 2006, the press reported that police arrested five men for alleged connections with terrorism and violence in the region, including the beheadings and the fatal 2004 shooting of Reverend Susianti.

On October 21, 2005, in Central Sulawesi, a man on a motorcycle fired at a house used for prayer meetings by a Christian congregation, injuring the owner.

A small bomb exploded outside a Hindu temple in a village near Poso, Central Sulawesi, in March 2006, seriously wounding a man who was guarding the compound.

In Maluku Province the number of those killed in possibly sectarian incidents continued to fall significantly during the period covered by this report. Maluku remained relatively calm since riots surrounding the commemoration of a separatist group in April 2004 killed dozens of Ambon residents; however, on August 24, 2005, a homemade bomb exploded from inside a pedicab in the Mardika market in Ambon City, injuring nine persons and damaging motorcycles and cars parked nearby. Po-

lice made five arrests; but continued to search for the suspected mastermind of the bombing.

A significant number of houses of worship were attacked, vandalized, forced to shut down, or prevented from being established as a result of militant groups and mobs throughout the country.

According to the Indonesian Christian Communication Forum (FKKI), militant groups forced the closing of at least thirty-four churches: Twenty-five in West Java, six in Banten, two in Central Java, and 1 in South Sulawesi during the reporting period. Some churches were attacked while services were in session. The Islam Defenders Group (FPI) and the Alliance for Anti-Apostates (AGAP) backed by local Muslim communities orchestrated most of the church closings. Some church leaders reported those groups threatened them with sticks and similar weapons to close down their church, although there were no reports of actual physical injuries. AGAP and FPI said they targeted churches that operated without the required permission of the local government and the surrounding community as required by the 1969 Joint Ministerial Decree on Houses of Worship. Many of the targeted churches operated out of private homes and storefronts. Although often present, police almost never acted to prevent forced church closings and sometimes assisted militant groups in the closure.

Muslims routinely reported difficulties in establishing mosques in Muslim-minority areas of Papua, North Sulawesi, and elsewhere.

During the reporting period, police concluded that a mentally ill man, Mangku Laper, was responsible for the January 2005 vandalism of at least six Hindu temples in Legian, Tuban, Kuta, and Kedoganan, Bali.

Conflict continued over the Sang Timur Catholic School near Jakarta. In 2004 a local Muslim community group, the Karang Tengah Islam Community Foundation (KTICF), with help from members of FPI, erected a wall that blocked access to the Sang Timur Catholic School. Local government workers later knocked the wall down, but in November 2005 local residents again blocked the main access to the school to prevent the school from rebuilding the access road. The incident reportedly did not disrupt the daily activities of the school.

On February 5, 2006, hundreds of persons closed down a luxurious house used as a Hindu temple called Guedwara Dharma Kalsa Temple in Karang Tengah District, Tangerang City, Banten Province. The residents in the neighborhood objected to the use of the house as a temple, arguing that no Hindus lived in the area.

Mobs attacked and vandalized at least seven Ahmadiyya mosques in West Java and two Ahmadiyya mosques in South Sulawesi during the reporting period.

On July 15, 2005, despite a heavy police presence, the Islam Defenders Group (FPI) led a mob in attacking the Ahmadiyya Indonesia Congregation (JAI) headquarters in Bogor, West Java. Armed with stones and batons, the assailants damaged Ahmadiyya buildings and set fire to a women's dormitory. The attack followed an aborted July 9 attack on the same Ahmadiyya property by individuals associated with the FPI. Police made no arrests in either attack. On July 20, 2005, the Bogor regency Consultative Leadership Council in West Java regency issued a decree prohibiting Ahmadiyya's activities in the area. The perpetrators of the attacks justified their actions by referring to the 1980 fatwa that declared Ahmadiyya to be "deviant" from Islam.

On September 19, 2005, in Cianjur, West Java, a mob reportedly attacked and vandalized an Ahmadiyya mosque and private homes and cars belonging to Ahmadiyya members; however, unlike the July attacks, the police reportedly arrested forty-five suspects and pursued criminal charges against twelve alleged ringleaders. Cianjur Regency formally banned all Ahmadiyya activities on September 28, 2005, purportedly to protect Ahmadiyya members from further attacks. The Ahmadiyya compound remained closed through the Idul Fitri holiday, an event that 500 to 700 followers normally attend, and remained closed at the end of this reporting period.

In two separate incidents in February and March 2006, mobs attacked, burned, or otherwise destroyed dozens of homes in Lombok, forcing 182 residents to evacuate and live in government provided barracks. At the end of the reporting period there was no viable plan for their resettlement.

On June 16, 2006, dozens of community members forced approximately fifty followers of Jamaah Salafi out of their village, Beroro, in West Nusa Tenggara. Attackers dragged the Salafi leader out of the village mosque to force him to sign an agreement stating the Salafi members would not return to their homes. Residents claimed they repeatedly warned Salafi members that the loud preaching emanating from the Jamaah Salafi's mosque on Fridays was offensive. Police were on the scene to prevent further physical violence but arrested no one in connection with

the incident. After seeking shelter at the police station, members safely returned home after community dialogues.

At times hard-line 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. On August 5, 2005, approximately 200 members of the FPI and the Islamic Umat Forum (FUI) gathered to attack JIL offices with the aim of forcing them out of Jakarta. Police blocked the access road to JIL, effectively forcing the mob to disband.

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. On October 16, 2005, during the holy month of Ramadan, 200 members of FPI attacked a known area of prostitution, clashing with tens of local residents. Police broke up the fight but made no arrests.

On some occasions, publications with controversial religious themes provoked outrage. In December 2005 the World Hindu Youth Organization (WHYO) protested the short film, "Shinta Obong," a film based on a story in "Ramayana," a holy Hindu book, for deviating from the original story. The filmmaker, Garin Nugroho, met with the Hindu community in Bali in January 2006 to apologize.

Unforced conversions between faiths occurred, as allowed by law, but they remained a source of controversy. Some converted to marry a person of another faith; others converted in response to religious outreach or social activities organized by religious groups. Some Muslims accused Christian missionaries of using food and microcredit programs to lure poor Muslims to conversion. Some of those who converted felt compelled not to publicize the event for family and social reasons.

Faith-based social organizations at times reportedly extracted financial contributions from non-Muslim merchants, particularly before major Islamic holidays. Most commonly, these actions relied on social pressure from Muslim-majority communities. Many of those targeted were ethnic Chinese, who generally practiced Buddhism, Christianity, or Confucianism.

In late July 2005 MUI issued fatwas denouncing pluralism, secularism, and liberal forms of Islam, along with interfaith marriage and interfaith prayer. While the fatwas generated heated debates and served as a factor behind subsequent militant actions, it produced no perceptible substantive impact on the law.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. mission in Indonesia, including the U.S. embassy in Jakarta, the consulate general in Surabaya, and the Medan office, regularly engaged government officials on specific religious freedom issues and also encouraged officials from other embassies to discuss the subject with the Government. Embassy staff at all levels met frequently with religious leaders and human rights advocates to promote respect for religious freedom. Embassy staff met regularly with NU and Muhammadiyah officials to clarify U.S. policy and discuss religious tolerance and other issues.

Mission outreach emphasized the importance of religious freedom and tolerance in a democratic society. During the period covered by this report, the mission promoted pluralism and tolerance through exchanges and civil society programs.

More than 220 Indonesians visited the United States on short-term programs examining the role of religion in U.S. society and politics. The program allowed these persons to see first hand how religious pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and multiculturalism are integral to a democratic society. Ten Fulbright scholars from the country went to the United States to study degrees directly related to religion in a democratic society. Six U.S. scholars came to the country to teach and conduct research on similar topics.

One notable visit during the period featured a speaking tour by Diana Eck in conjunction with the launch of the embassy-produced translation of her book, "A New Religious America"; programs like this (twenty-five in all) contributed balance and academic rigor to current discourse in the country about the place of religion in society.

The U.S. mission reached millions through the production of media programs critical to providing in-depth coverage on religious freedom issues from an American perspective. The mission cosponsored a radio show featuring perspectives on religious difference, tolerance, and pluralism from the perspective of the country's high school and college students living in the United States. A press tour and a jointly produced documentary series generated positive coverage of civic society and volunteerism in America, highlighting how faith-based groups are part of the diverse

mix that define positive citizen action in America. The mission contributed a 1,000 sets of video compact discs based on another jointly produced television documentary series, "The Colors of Democracy," highlighting the positive impact of religious pluralism and interfaith activities in schools and libraries.

The mission supported the "Religion and Tolerance" call-in weekly talk show that is one of the most widely heard radio talk shows in Asia, promoting democracy, gender equality, and religious pluralism. Listeners from Aceh to Papua responded enthusiastically to the radio program.

Beginning March 2006 the United States, through the Centre for Religious and Cultural Studies at Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta, started a biweekly-televised talk show simultaneously broadcasted on fifty-eight radio stations throughout the country. The program provided an estimated three million listeners the opportunity to listen to and actively engage in public debates on religious tolerance, human rights, and democracy. The biweekly publication of talk-show transcripts and articles in the newspaper further ensured public access to the debates.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 145,884 square miles and a population of 128 million. It was difficult to accurately determine the number of adherents of different religious groups. While academics estimated that 20 to 30 percent of adults actively practiced a faith, the Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2004 that 213,826,661 citizens claimed a religion. That number, which is nearly twice Japan's population, reflected many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions, particularly Shintoism and Buddhism. Many citizens practiced both Buddhist and Shinto rites. Furthermore, membership statistics kept by the agency were based on self-reports from various religious organizations.

Of citizens who claimed a faith, 51 percent were Shinto, 44 percent were Buddhist and 1 percent was Christian. Shintoism and Buddhism are not mutually exclusive and most Shinto and Buddhist believers follow both faiths. Approximately 5 percent of the population belonged to other religious groups, including the Unification Church, Tenrikyo, Seichounoie, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, and Perfect Liberty. According to the Japan Muslim Association, there were approximately one-hundred thousand Muslims in the country; an estimated 7 to 10 percent were Japanese citizens. There was also a small Jewish population. Most were foreign born.

As of March 2004, under the 1951 Religious Corporation 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 Nara. In addition to traditional Buddhist schools, there are a number of Buddhist lay organizations; Soka Gakkai, which reported a membership of eight million, is the largest. The two main schools of Shintoism are Jinjashinto and Kyohashinto. Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations had modest followings.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution (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.

In the wake of the 1995 sarin gas attack on Tokyo's subway system by the cult Aum Shinrikyo, the Religious Corporation Law was amended in 1996 to provide the Government with increased authority for oversight of religious groups. The amended law also required greater disclosure of financial assets by religious corporations.

As of December 2004 there were 182,237 groups registered as religious corporations, according to the Agency for Cultural Affairs. The Government does not require religious groups to register or be licensed; however, registered religious corporations receive tax benefits and other advantages. In practice, almost all religious groups register.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Allegations by the Unification Church that the Government was unresponsive to claims that its members were being confined and deprogrammed decreased. Unification Church leadership reported that the number of abductions declined due to the Government's increasing willingness to prosecute deprogrammers. However, church leaders continued to express concern over the Government's unwillingness to prosecute abductors. According to church officials, police often refused to intercede because abductions often involved family members abducting other family members.

According to a spokesman for Jehovah's Witnesses, members were free to practice their religion without restriction. There was only one alleged forced confinement in January 2005, which was reported to the police. Since 2003 there have been no reported deprogramming cases involving members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There is widespread respect for religious freedom in the society.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, including the promotion of religious freedom internationally. The U.S. embassy maintains periodic contact with representatives of religious organizations.

KIRIBATI

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, an island state of 265 square miles, had a population of approximately ninety thousand. Missionaries introduced Christianity into the area in the mid-19th century. According to 2002 government statistics, major religious groups included: The Roman Catholic Church (55 percent); Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC), formerly the Congregational Church (37 percent); Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (3 percent); Seventh-day Adventists (2 percent); and the Baha'i Faith (2 percent). Several of the smaller Christian churches claimed to have higher percentages of adherents now, but there was no independent confirmation. Persons with no religious preference accounted for an estimated 5 percent of the population. Members of the Catholic faith were concentrated in the northern islands of the Gilbert Islands group, while Protestants were the majority in the southern Gilbert Islands.

The Mormons, Council of World Missions, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists all had missionaries in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 religion, nor were there separate legal categories for different religions.

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

Christianity, the religion of more than 90 percent of the population, remained a dominant social and cultural force, but relations were amicable among the country's religious groups.

Nonbelievers, who constituted a small percentage of residents, did not suffer discrimination. Most governmental and social functions begin and end with an interdenominational Christian prayer delivered by an ordained minister, cleric, or other church official.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KOREA

The constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief"; however, in practice the Government severely 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 extremely poor level of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The regime continued to repress unauthorized religious groups. Recent 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 outside the country, have been arrested and subjected to harsh penalties. 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 inaccessibility and 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.

No information was available on societal attitudes toward religious freedom.

The U.S. Government did 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 fora.

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, nongovernmental organization reports,

missionary and refugee testimony obtained over the past decade, and supplemented where possible by information drawn from more recent reports from visitors to the country and representatives of nongovernmental organizations working on the Chinese border. Refugee testimony is often dated because of the time lapse between refugee departures from the country and contact with NGOs able to document human rights conditions. The report cites specific sources and time frames 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 its population is estimated at 22.7 million. The number of religious believers was unknown but was estimated by the Government to be ten thousand Protestants, ten thousand Buddhists, and four thousand Catholics. Estimates by South Korean 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 forty thousand practitioners. According to a South Korean press report, in 2002 the chairman of the Association of North Korean Catholics stated that the Catholic community in the country had no priests but held weekly prayer services at the Changchung Catholic Church in Pyongyang. 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 Christian churches: Two Protestant churches under lay leadership—the Pongsu and Chilgok churches—and the Changchung Roman Catholic Church. The three churches have reportedly been open since 1988. However, these churches are tightly controlled by the state. 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 Korean Presbyterian Church, under an agreement with the North Korean Christian League, has reportedly been building a new church in Pyongyang.

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 officially recognized church structure and were not recognized by the Government. NGOs estimated that there may be between 500 and 1,000 underground churches. The regime has not allowed outsiders the access necessary to confirm such claims. Some older citizens who were religious believers before 1953 reportedly have maintained their faith in secret over the years.

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 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. It 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 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 resident in Pyongyang who visited the site and were told that the two monks living there may soon be joined by more. 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 Russian Orthodox Church continued to build an edifice in Pyongyang, reportedly commissioned by Kim Jong-Il after he visited an Orthodox cathedral in Russia in 2002. The building, the first of its kind in the country, is scheduled to open by August 2006. According to a Russian press report, a Russian priest served the cathedral.

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.

Outsiders had limited ability to ascertain the level of government control over these groups, but was generally assumed they are monitored closely.

According to the 2006 Korean Institute for National Unifications (KINU) White Paper, there was no evidence that any of the central religious organizations maintained branches in the provinces.

Prior to 2003, many foreign religious leaders visited the country. However, after the Government expelled U.N. inspectors from the country in 2003, the number of religious visitors appeared to decrease.

In April 2006, the Catholic archdiocese of Seoul sent a sixty-one 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.

In spring 2006, Bishop Lazarus You Heung-sik of the ROK Taejon diocese also visited the and established an agreement that all Catholic humanitarian aid to the North would be directed through South Korean Caritas and discussed through inter-Korean cooperation channels.

In June 2005 Venerable Beop Jang, head of the largest ROK Buddhist group 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 Inter-Korean summit.

Evangelical Episcopal 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 fifteen thousand Christians in the country in March 2007. Warren was to visit the country in July to plan the 2007 preaching trip, but the planning trip was postponed following the Government's July 4–5 missile launches.

In October 2005, a delegation from the DPRK Christian Federation attended an international solidarity meeting in Frankfurt, Germany, sponsored by the German Evangelical Church, according to a Government media report.

In December 2005 citizens who were expected to staff Pyongyang's Russian Orthodox Cathedral when it opens traveled to Vladivostok for training in ordination and other rituals.

Foreign religious activity frequently is connected with humanitarian relief, and overseas religious relief organizations have been active in responding to the country's food crisis. An overseas Buddhist group, Join Together Society, continued to operate a factory in the Rajin-Sonbong Free Trade Zone to produce food for preschool children, which it has done since 1998. A noodle factory established by contributions from Catholics of the Seoul archdiocese opened in 2001. The Unification Church, which had business ventures in the country, was believed to be constructing an interfaith religious facility in Pyongyang.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief"; however, in practice the Government severely restricted religious freedom, including discouraging organized religious activities except those controlled by officially recognized groups. Genuine religious freedom does not exist. The constitution also stipulates that religion "should not be used for purposes of dragging in foreign powers or endangering public security." Ownership of Bibles or other religious materials is reportedly illegal and may be punished by imprisonment or execution.

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 described 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, is regarded as opposition to the national interest and may result in severe punishment.

Although the country's first constitution guaranteed freedom of religion, the Government identified large numbers of religiously active persons as "counterrevolutionaries," both during and immediately after the Korean War. Many of these individuals were subsequently killed or imprisoned in concentration camps.

The Government later codified the oppression of religion in the early 1970s through a constitutional revision on "freedom of antireligious activity." The Government began to moderate its religious discrimination policies in the late 1980s, when it launched a campaign highlighting Kim Il Sung's "benevolent politics." As part of this campaign, the regime allowed the formation of several government-sponsored religious organizations. Foreigners who have met with representatives of these organizations believe that some members are genuinely religious but note that others appear to know little about religious dogma or teaching. 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. A constitutional change in 1992 authorized religious gatherings, provided for "the right to build buildings for religious use," and deleted the clause regarding freedom of antireligious propaganda.

Civic groups and religious organizations in the ROK continued to be active in efforts to promote inter-Korean reconciliation. During the reporting period, Buddhist and Christian groups from the ROK traveled to the country for discussions and cultural exchanges with their counterparts in the country and ended the meetings in joint prayer sessions for unification. These exchanges generally received favorable coverage in the state-controlled media; however, their true effect on religious freedom in the country was unclear.

Several schools for religious education exist in the country. There are three-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 Federation of Chosun Christianity, 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 and evangelists.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The KINU 2006 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 their 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 still 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, 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 which are given to government-approved churches were channeled to the Korean Workers Party (the only party in the country). There are unconfirmed reports that nonreligious children of religious believers may be employed at midlevels of the Government. In the past, such individuals suffered broad discrimination with sometimes severe penalties or even imprisonment. Members of underground churches connected to border missionary activity were regarded as subversive elements.

In 2001 the U.N. Human Rights Committee noted "with regret" that the Government was unable to provide up-to-date information about religious freedom in the country. The committee also noted its concern regarding the authorities' practices with respect to religious freedom, "in the light of information available to the committee that religious practice is repressed or strongly discouraged." The committee requested that the Government provide up-to-date information regarding the number of citizens belonging to religious communities and the number of places of worship, as well as "practical measures taken by the authorities to guarantee freedom of exercise of religious practice" by the religious communities in the country. In 2002, the country submitted a report to the U.N. Human Rights Committee. In the report, the country claimed that there were few religious adherents in the country because "Many of them were killed during the three-year-long Korean War. Old people died of age and young people seldom believe in religion."

The KINU 2006 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 to the regime. Religious and human rights groups outside of the country have provided numerous, usually unconfirmed, reports that members of underground churches have been beaten, arrested, tortured, or killed because of their religious beliefs in prior years. In recent years, 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 missionaries while in China.

Defector reports indicated that the regime has increased 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, defectors, and missionaries indicated that 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 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 working as a spy for the ROK. However, NGOs claimed that the Government issued the sentence against Son Jong Nam on the basis of his contacts with Christian groups in China, his proselytizing activities in the country and alleged sharing of information with his brother in the ROK. Because the country effectively bars outside observers from investigating such reports, it was not possible to verify the country's claims about Son Jong Nam's activities or determine whether he had been executed.

In April 2006 a ROK court sentenced alleged agent Yoo Young-hwa to ten years of imprisonment for his role in the abduction of Kim Dong Shik. Kim, a missionary who worked with North Korean refugees in China, disappeared from his home near the China-DPRK border in 2000. He allegedly was kidnapped by North Korean agents for assisting in the resettlement of DPRK refugees in the ROK. Because the country effectively bars outside observers from investigating such reports, it was not possible to determine Kim's whereabouts.

NGOs reported as recently as 2001 that the Government conducts "education sessions" to identify Christian leaders so that they could be apprehended in periodic crackdowns.

News reports in recent years indicated that the Government has increased the reward for information on any person doing missionary work in the Chinese border region.

There was no reliable information on the number of religious detainees or prisoners, but there were unconfirmed reports that many people were detained for their religious beliefs and activities. Prison conditions were harsh; starvation and forced labor were common. In the past, visitors to the country observed prisoners being marched in leg irons, metal collars, or shackles. Sanitation was poor, and prisoners reported having no change of clothing during months of detention.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There was no information available on societal attitudes toward religious freedom. The regime does not allow representatives of foreign governments, journalists, or other visitors the freedom of movement that would enable them to assess fully religious freedom in the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government did not have diplomatic relations with the country and has no official presence there. 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 with diplomatic relations with the country. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher Hill publicly stated that dialogue on the country's human rights record will be a part of any future normalization process between the country and the U.S. Government. In April 2005 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 (NKHRA). They and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom have repeatedly raised awareness of the deplorable human rights conditions in the country through speeches before U.S. audiences.

In response to serious concerns over the country's human rights record, Congress enacted the 2004 NKHRA. In August 2005 the president appointed Jay Lefkowitz as Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea in keeping with one provision of the NKHRA. Since his appointment, Special Envoy Lefkowitz has urged other countries, including the Republic of Korea and Japan, to join the growing international campaign urging the country to address its human rights conditions and abuses of religious freedom.

In April 2005, for the third consecutive year, the U.S. Government worked with other concerned governments to win passage of a resolution condemning the country's deplorable human rights record at the 61st Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The resolution expressed "deep concern about reports of systemic, widespread and grave violations of human rights" and note(d) with regret that the authorities "have not created the necessary conditions to permit the international community to verify these reports." The resolution also called on the Government to fulfill its obligations under human rights instruments to which it is a party and ensure that humanitarian organizations and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the DPRK have free access to the country. In November 2005, the U.S. co-sponsored a similar resolution before the U.N. General Assembly that condemned the country's human rights record, marking the first time the General Assembly passed such a resolution.

In 2005 the U.S. Department of State provided the National Endowment for Democracy with a $496,000 grant to improve and expand monitoring and reporting on human rights conditions in the country. The U.S. Department of State also provided a grant to Freedom House for a series of conferences and other activities dedicated to pressuring the regime to end its abuses. Radio Free Asia and Voice of America also provides regular Korean-language broadcasting. U.S. Government policy allows U.S. citizens to travel to the country, and a number of churches and religious groups have organized efforts to alleviate suffering caused by shortages of food and medicine.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 38,023 square miles, and its population is approximately forty-eight million. According to a 2005 government survey, when the population stood at 47,041,000, the number of adherents of the predominant religions were: Buddhism, 10,726,000; Protestantism, 8,616,000; Roman Catholicism, 5,146,000; Confucianism, 105 thousand; Won Buddhism, 130 thousand; and other religions, 247 thousand. A total of 22,071,000 citizens did not practice any religion. The percentage of adherents of each faith has remained approximately the same in recent years.

No official figures were available on the membership of other religious groups in the country, 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 approximately twenty-seven orders. The Catholic Church had sixteen dioceses. The Christian Council of Korea reported that there were an estimated fifteen Protestant denominations, including the Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches, and the Korean Gospel Church Assembly. Within these Protestant denominations there were approximately 121 Protestant subgroups, an estimated 80 percent of which were Presbyterian subdivisions.

According to Gallup Korea's 2004 survey on the state of religion in the country, 36.0 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 with 71 percent, Catholics 42.9 percent, and Buddhists 3.5 percent.

Foreign-based missionary groups operated freely. Protestant groups included: Overseas Mission; Overseas Missionary Fellowship; Campus Crusade for Christ, Youth Mission; Global Mission Bible Translator; World Wide Evangelization for Christ; and Serving in Mission for Christ. Catholic groups included: Missionaries of Guadeloupe; Maryknoll Fathers; Little Brothers of Jesus; Claretian Missionaries; Consolate Missionaries; Divine Word Missionaries; and Missionaries of Charity Brothers. In 2005 the country sent more than fourteen thousand missionaries abroad, making it the second largest source of missionaries after the United States.

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 two days does not negatively impact other religious groups.

The Government does not require or 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 Korea Religious Council and the Council for Peaceful Religions to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. The bureau

also is responsible for planning regular events such as the Religion and Art Festival, the Seminar for Religious Leaders, and the Symposium for Religious Newspapers and Journalists.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Government provides no exemption or alternative civilian service for those who have a religious objection to service in the armed forces. According to the Ministry of National Defense, in 2005 Jehovah's Witnesses accounted for 818 of the 828 men who rejected military service. Of the total, 598 had pending trials. Of the 225 convicted in 2005, 220 were given eighteen to twenty-four month prison sentences. They were allowed to conduct their own religious services in prison. During the period covered by this report, the issue of conscientious objectors continued to be discussed by the public, politicians, Government, and in the courts. The proposed revisions regarding conscientious objectors to the National Military Service Law were pending in the National Assembly's National Defense Committee. In December 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 seventeen-member committee, made up of scholars, lawyers, journalists, religious leaders, civic activists, and military officials, to study ways to introduce and to establish the standards for such alternative service.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. In June 2004 angry citizens demonstrated at the mosque in Seoul for about a month following the beheading of Korean hostage Kim Sun-il in Iraq. The Government provided security and protection to the mosque but did not interfere with the demonstrations, since they were legal assemblies. According to the Institute for Middle East Studies, once the anger over the beheading subsided, Muslims in the country returned to their normal routines and worshipped freely.

Religious leaders regularly met both privately and under government auspices to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. These meetings were given wide and favorable coverage by the media.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials also met regularly with members of various religious communities to discuss issues related to human rights.

LAOS

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricted this right in practice. Some government officials committed abuses of citizens' religious freedom.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In most parts of the country, officials generally respected the constitutionally guaranteed rights of members of most faiths to worship, but within constraints imposed by the Government. Authorities in some areas continued to display intolerance for minority religious practice, especially by evangelical Christians. The Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), the popular front organization for the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP), 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. Although this decree has contributed to greater religious tolerance since it was promulgated, authorities used its many conditions to restrict some aspects of religious practice.

Decree 92 institutionalized the Government's role as the final arbiter of permissible religious activities.

During the period covered by this report, some local officials pressured minority Christians to renounce their faith on threat of arrest or forceful eviction from their villages. Such cases occurred in Bokeo, Oudomsai, and Salavan provinces. Arrests and detention of Christians occurred in Bokeo, Bolikhamsai, Salavan, and Vientiane Municipality. In December 2005 authorities in Bolikhamsai province detained a group of twenty-seven ethnic Hmong. The group—all minors but one—were residents at the Petchaboon displaced persons settlement in northern Thailand, and were irregularly sent into the country by Thai authorities who believed they were illegal immigrants. Some sources indicated that the group was Christian, and may have been detained in the country in part due to its religious affiliation. These twenty-seven Hmong were still in detention at the end of the reporting period. Additionally, a Lao Evangelical Church (LEC) in Bokeo Province was burned by village officials and six church leaders were arrested in late 2005. Five of the six leaders were later released, but one church leader died after being transferred from jail to a military hospital. In early 2006 a village chief in Oudomsai Province confiscated the land of several Christian families.

Moreover, a Christian in Salavan Province has been under house arrest since April 1, 2006 for refusing to renounce his faith. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were thirty known religious prisoners, all members of the LEC, with the exception of the twenty-seven ethnic Hmong that were deported from Thailand.

There were generally amicable relations among the various religious groups, although differences in religious beliefs among villagers led to tensions. Conflicts between ethnic groups sometimes exacerbated religious tensions. The efforts of some Protestant congregations to establish churches independent of the LEC 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 dialogue. The embassy maintained frequent contact with religious leaders, and official visitors from the U.S. Government, including the Deputy Secretary of State, have repeatedly encouraged greater religious freedom in the country.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately eighty-five thousand square miles and an estimated population of 5.8 million. Almost all ethnic or "lowland" Lao are followers of Theravada Buddhism; however, lowland Lao constituted only about 40–50 percent of the population. The remainder of the population belonged to at least forty-seven distinct ethnic minority groups. Most of these ethnic minorities were practitioners of animism, with beliefs that varied greatly between groups. Animism predominated among some Sino-Thai groups, such as the Thai Dam and Thai Daeng, as well as among Mon-Khmer and Burmo-Tibetan groups. Even among lowland Lao, many pre-Buddhist animistic religious beliefs had been incorporated into Theravada Buddhist practice. Catholics and Protestants constituted approximately 2 percent of the population. Other minority religious groups included the Baha'i Faith, Islam, Mahayana Buddhism, and Confucianism. A very small number of citizens followed no religion.

Theravada Buddhism was by far the most prominent organized religion in the country, with nearly five thousand temples serving as the focus of religious practice and faith as well as the center of community life in rural areas. In most lowland Lao villages, religious tradition remained strong. Most Buddhist men spend some part of their lives as monks in a temple, even if only for a few days. There were approximately twenty-two thousand monks in the country, nearly nine thousand of whom have attained the rank of "senior monk," indicating years of study in a temple. In addition there were approximately 450 nuns, generally older women who were widowed, residing in temples throughout the country. The Buddhist Church was under the direction of a supreme patriarch who resided in Vientiane and supervised 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 maintained a following in the country. Abbots and monks of several temples, particularly in Vientiane, reportedly were followers of the Thammayudh School, which placed greater emphasis on meditation and discipline.

In Vientiane there were four Mahayana Buddhist pagodas, two serving the ethnic Vietnamese community and two serving the ethnic Chinese community. Buddhist

monks from Vietnam, China, and India have visited these pagodas freely to conduct services and minister to worshippers. There were at least four large Mahayana Buddhist pagodas in other urban centers and smaller Mahayana pagodas in villages near the borders of Vietnam and China.

The Roman Catholic Church had approximately forty thousand adherents, many of whom were 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 had an established presence in five of the most populous central and southern provinces, where Catholics were able to worship openly. The Catholic Church's activities were more circumscribed in the north, although there were signs the Government was permitting a revival of the Catholic community there. Three bishops, located in Vientiane, Thakhek, and Pakse, were able to visit Rome to confer with church officials. The Government did not permit a fourth bishop, assigned to the northern part of the country, to take up his post in Luang Prabang, but did permit him to travel to the north periodically to visit church congregations. The Church's property there was seized after 1975 and there was no longer a parsonage in that city; the bishop remains in residence in Vientiane. An informal Catholic training center in Thakhek prepared a small number of priests to serve the Catholic community. Several foreign nuns have served temporarily in the Vientiane diocese.

Approximately 300 Protestant congregations conducted services throughout the country for a community that has grown rapidly in the past decade. Church officials estimated Protestants to number as many as one-hundred thousand, although actual numbers were probably closer to half this figure. The LFNC recognized two Protestant groups: The LEC, which is the umbrella Protestant church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The LFNC required all Protestant groups except Adventists to operate under the LEC's overall direction. Many Protestants were members of ethnic Mon-Khmer groups, especially the Khmu in the north and the Brou in the central provinces. Protestants also have expanded rapidly in the Hmong and Yao communities. In urban areas, the LEC has attracted many lowland Lao followers. Most LEC members are concentrated in the Vientiane municipality, in the provinces of Vientiane, Sayaboury, Luang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, Bolikhamsai, Savannakhet, Champassak, Attapeu, and in the former Saisomboun Special Zone, but smaller congregations were found throughout the country.

The Seventh-day Adventist congregation numbered fewer than one thousand followers in Vientiane City, Bokeo Province, and one small Hmong community in Xieng Khouang province.

All approved Christian religious faiths owned properties in Vientiane City, although some of their properties have not been officially recognized by the Government. In addition the LEC maintained properties in Savannakhet and Pakse. Two informal churches, one English-speaking and one Korean-speaking, served Vientiane's foreign Protestant community.

Within the LEC, some congregations have sought greater independence and have forged their own connections with Protestant groups abroad. As the LEC has grown, an increased diversity of views has emerged among adherents and pastors, and one or two groups quietly have sought to register with the LFNC as separate denominations. Two of the more active of these "underground" denominations are Methodists and Jehovah's Witnesses, both of which have unsuccessfully sought official government approval for their activities. Other denominations that have some following in the country include the Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Lutherans, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Baptists. Although the prime minister's Decree on Religious Practice established procedures for new denominations to register, the Government's desire to consolidate religious practice for purposes of control has effectively blocked new registrations. In early 2006 the Methodists once again requested to register with the Government as a religious group separate and apart from the LEC.

New guidelines issued by the LFNC in early 2004 required all other Protestant denominations wishing to establish congregations in the country to do so under the aegis of the LEC. In theory denominations not registered with the LFNC were not allowed to practice their faith. These unregistered "independent" churches expressed concern about being forced to cease activities. 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.

There were approximately 400 adherents of Islam in the country, the vast majority of whom were foreign permanent residents of South Asian and Cambodian (Cham) origin. There were two active mosques in Vientiane that ministered to the Sunni branch of Islam, but both were open to visits by Shiite worshippers as well.

The Baha'i Faith had approximately eight thousand adherents and four centers: Two in Vientiane Municipality, one in Vientiane Province, and one in Savannakhet. A small number of Baha'is also lived in Khammouane Province and in Pakse City. The land on which the four Baha'i centers were located was approved by the Lao Government this year for use by the Baha'is. Additionally, the Government has given official approval for Baha'is to use land where they already have a cemetery. The Baha'is were planning to construct new spiritual centers in Savannkhet's Dong Bang Village and in Lat Khouay Village in Vientiane Municipality. They have received both village and district level approval to use the land, but were awaiting the official land deeds from the District Land Offices. Small groups of followers of Confucianism and Taoism practiced their beliefs in the larger cities.

Although the Government prohibited foreigners from proselytizing, some resident foreigners associated with private businesses or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) quietly engage in missionary activity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, local authorities in particular sometimes violated this right. Article 30 of the constitution provides for freedom of religion, a fact frequently cited by officials in reference to religious tolerance. Article 9 of the constitution, however, discouraged all acts that create divisions among religions and persons. The Government interpreted this clause restrictively, and cites it as a reason for placing constraints on religious practice, especially those of minority religions. Although official pronouncements accept the existence of different religions, they emphasize religion's potential to divide, distract, or destabilize. Local and central government officials widely referenced Article 9 as justification for prohibiting such religious activities as proselytizing.

A person arrested or convicted for religious offenses had little protection under the law. Persons detained may be held for lengthy periods without trial. Court judges, not juries, decided guilt or innocence in court cases, and accused person's defense rights were limited. All religious groups, including Buddhists, practice their faith in an atmosphere in which application of the law was arbitrary. Certain actions interpreted by officials as threatening could bring harsh punishment. Religious practice is "free" only if practitioners stay within tacitly understood guidelines of what was 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 inevitably attributed to the victims rather than the persecuting officials. In some cases, officials concocted patently unbelievable explanations for events in order to exonerate local officials.

In twenty articles, Decree 92 establishes guidelines for religious activities in a broad range of areas. While the decree provides that the Government "respects and protects legitimate activities of believers," it also seeks to ensure that religious practice "conforms to the laws and regulations." Decree 92 reserves for the LFNC the "right and duty to manage and promote" religious practice, requiring that nearly all aspects of religious practice receive the approval of the LFNC office having responsibility for the village or district where the activity occurs.

The rules legitimized many activities that were previously regarded as illegal, such as proselytizing, printing religious material, owning and building houses of worship, and maintaining contact with overseas religious groups. However, in practice the Government was able to impose restrictions on religious activities through the required LFNC approval. The Government required several religious groups, apparently with the exception of the Buddhists, to report periodically to the Religious Affairs Department of the LFNC. According to some religious leaders, the Government's request for such reports had recently become more frequent, indicating that in the past reports were due annually, then every six months, and recently requested after four months. There was also a restriction against publication of religious materials that applies to most religious groups, with the exception of Buddhists.

Both the constitution and Decree 92 asserted that religious practice should serve national interests by promoting development and education and instructing believers to be good citizens. The Government presumes both a right and a duty to oversee religious practice at all levels to ensure such practice fills this role in society. In effect this has led the Government to intervene in the activities of minority religious groups, particularly Christians, on the grounds that their practices did not promote national interests, or demonstrated disloyalty to the Government.

Although the state was 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 give Theravada Buddhism the status of an unofficial national religion. Many persons regard Buddhism as both an integral part of the national culture and a way of life. The increasing incorporation of Buddhist ritual and ceremony in state functions reflected the elevated status of Buddhism in society.

In some areas where animism predominates among ethnic minority groups, local authorities have actively encouraged those groups to adopt Buddhism and abandon their "backward" beliefs in magic and spirits. The Government discouraged animist practices that it regards 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 one's home. Aspects of nontraditional religious beliefs have penetrated Protestant congregations in some areas. In Xieng Khouang Province, a Hmong Christian congregation adopted millenarian practices in its worship service. According to provincial authorities, these beliefs led a senior church member to kill his wife late in 2003, predicting her resurrection in three days. Officials from the LFNC later asked the Seventh-day Adventist Church to incorporate this Hmong congregation into its community to bring its doctrines into line with those of an approved denomination.

Although the Government did not maintain diplomatic relations with the Holy See, the Papal Nuncio visits from Thailand and coordinates with the Government on assistance programs, especially for lepers and persons with disabilities.

Muslims in the small Islamic community were able to practice their faith openly 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. Since 2001 the Government has more closely scrutinized the activities of the small Muslim population but has not interfered with the community's religious activities. In 2005 and 2006 a local Muslim leader represented the Government, along with members of other religious groups, at an Interfaith Conference on Religion in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The small Seventh-day Adventist Church, confined to a handful of congregations in Vientiane and in Bokeo Province, reported no government interference in its activities in recent years, and its members appeared to be free to practice their faith.

The Baha'i spiritual assemblies in Vientiane and Savannakhet cities practiced freely, but smaller communities in Khammouane and Savannakhet provinces have periodically faced restrictions by local authorities. The Baha'i assembly previously encountered difficulties establishing its ownership of the Baha'i center in Vientiane; however, in 2005 authorities granted approval for use of the property by the Baha'is. Baha'i local spiritual assemblies and the national spiritual assembly routinely held Baha'i nineteen-day feasts and celebrated all holy days. The National Spiritual Assembly in Vientiane met regularly and has sent delegations to the Universal House of Justice in Mount Carmel, in Haifa, Israel.

The Government observes two religious holidays Boun That Luang (the end of Buddhist Lent) and the Buddhist New Year in April. 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. In the past, local officials in some areas obstructed Christian congregations' observance of religious holidays such as Christmas. Some church officials indicated that Christmas activities in 2005 were more restricted than in past years, particularly in Vientiane Municipality.

Authorities required new denominations to join other religious groups with similar historical antecedents despite clear differences between the groups' beliefs. In March 2004 the LFNC's Order Number 1 required all Protestant groups to become a part of the LEC or the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The order states that no other denominations will be permitted to register, a measure to prevent "disharmony" in the religious community.

There was no religious instruction in public schools nor were there any parochial or religiously affiliated schools operating in the country. Several private pre-schools and English language schools received support from religious groups abroad, however. 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 Sun-

day schools for children and young persons. Baha'i spiritual assemblies conduct religious training for children as well as for adult members.

The Government required and routinely granted permission for formal links with coreligionists 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; evangelical Protestants associated with the LEC, and other Protestant groups that would have liked to be recognized as separate from the LEC, continued to be the target of most restrictions. Although not subjected to harassment, the Government observed the Buddhist hierarchy closely. The Buddhist Supreme Patriarch, or Sangkarat, maintained close links to the Government. As a result of the Government's decentralization policy that diffused power to provinces and districts, central government control over the behavior of local officials was weak. Local officials were often unaware of government policies on issues such as religious tolerance due to the absence of rule of law, coupled with the incomplete dissemination and application of existing laws and regulations. The LFNC at times visited areas where religious persecution had taken place in order to instruct local officials on government policy and regulation. More often, the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department encouraged local or provincial governments to resolve conflicts on their own and in accordance with Decree 92.

The larger urban areas such as Vientiane, Thakhek, Pakse, and Savannakhet cities experienced little or no overt religious abuse, according to religious leaders in those areas. The large Protestant and Catholic communities of several provinces, including Xieng Khouang, Khammouane, and Champassak, reported no difficulties with authorities. Relations between officials and Christians in these areas were generally cordial. Throughout the country, however, religious practice reportedly was restrained by official rules and policies that allowed properly registered religious groups to practice their faith only under circumscribed conditions.

Between 1999 and 2001 local authorities closed approximately twenty of Vientiane Province's sixty LEC churches, primarily in Hin Hoep, Feuang, and Vang Vieng Districts, and approximately sixty-five LEC churches in Savannakhet and Luang Prabang provinces. With a more relaxed policy of religious tolerance beginning in 2002, most of these churches were allowed to reopen, particularly in Vientiane and Luang Prabang provinces. However, officials in several districts of Savannakhet Province did not allow local congregations to reopen five or six of Savannakhet's approximately forty churches and they remained closed at the end of the reporting period. Officials in Khamsan Village continued to refuse permission to the village's LEC congregation to reopen its church, which was closed in 2003. Officials in Muang Feuang district of Vientiane Province granted permission for LEC members to reconstruct a destroyed church in Phone Ngam village in 2005 and the church has since reopened.

During the reporting period, there were no reported LEC church closures apart from one church that was burned by village officials in Houaysay Noi Village in Bokeo Province. Six church leaders were subsequently arrested and imprisoned in late 2005. One of the church leaders, Som Sack, a former district governor, became ill while in prison and was moved to a military hospital where he died in November. Some religious figures noted that the Government had stopped paying Som Sack his retirement pay after he had converted to Christianity a few years earlier. Two arrestees were reportedly released in early December 2005 and the remaining three in late December.

In 2004 the Government quietly allowed a handful of new churches to be constructed, including the first Catholic Church built in northern Laos since 1975, a Catholic church in Bolikhamsai Province, and four new LEC churches in the former Saisomboun Special Zone and Bolikhamsai Province. Vientiane Province authorities also permitted LEC Christians to rebuild a destroyed church in Phone Ngam Village. 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.

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 promulgation of Decree 92, officials from the LFNC's Religious Affairs Department have said that home churches should be replaced with designated church structures whenever possible. At the same time, village and district-level 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 encountered 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.

In addition authorities required new denominations to join other religious groups with similar historical antecedents despite clear differences between the groups' beliefs. In at least two provinces, Xieng Khouang and Luang Prabang, authorities used threats of arrest of senior church leaders to force "independent" churches loosely affiliated with the U.S.-based United Methodist Church to return to the LEC. In other areas of the country, however, independent churches have generally been allowed to conduct services without hindrance by local authorities. As of early 2006, however, some village and district officials appear to be taking a stronger stance against unauthorized Methodist congregations.

The authorities remained suspicious of patrons of religious communities other than Buddhism, especially evangelical Christian groups, in part because these faiths do not share the high degree of direction and incorporation into the Government structure that Theravada Buddhism does. Some authorities criticized Christianity as a Western or imperialist "import" into the country. In the past decade, the LEC suffered the brunt of local-level efforts to close churches, arrest church leaders, and force members to renounce their faith. The LEC's rapid growth over the last decade, its contacts with religious groups abroad, the active proselytizing on the part of some of its members, and its independence of government control contributed to government 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. In view of this, the Government's hostility to organized Christianity can be seen as the defensive measure of a regime bent on securing its power against all potential threats. 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 period covered by this report there were no reports of official interference with or denial of permission to hold religious celebrations in churches, but there were reports that Christians in villages were not allowed to hold Christian celebrations in their homes, thus restricting Christian activities to church buildings only. There were no reports of security forces stopping vehicles during Sunday worship hours to prevent villagers from traveling to attend worship services.

Longstanding restrictions on the Catholic Church's operations in the north left only a handful of small congregations in Sayaboury, Bokeo, and Luang Namtha; however, there were signs during the reporting period that the Government was easing its control over the Catholic community in the north. The Government permitted more frequent visits by the Bishop of Luang Prabang to the north to conduct services for the scattered Catholic community there, but it continued to restrict his travel. There were no ordained Catholic priests operating in the north. Several church properties, including a school in Vientiane, were seized by the Government after 1975 and have not been returned, nor has the Government provided restitution. In early 2005 authorities allowed Catholics in Ban Pong Vang of Sayaboury Province to construct a new church with assistance from the Papal Nuncio Office in Bangkok. This was the first Catholic Church built in the north since the creation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in 1975. In the central and southern parts of the country, Catholic congregations practiced their religion relatively freely.

In late 2005 the Catholic Church planned to conduct an ordination in Bolilkhamsai Province. The Government initially blocked the ordination, which would have been the first Catholic ordination in the country since 1975; however, in June 2006 the ordination was allowed to proceed in Vientiane Municipality along with the ordination of a deacon in Champassak Province.

The Government prohibited foreigners from proselytizing, although it permitted foreign NGOs with religious affiliations to work in the country. Foreigners caught distributing religious materials could have been arrested or deported. Decree 92 specifically authorized proselytizing by local citizens, providing the LFNC approves the activity. In practice the authorities interpreted proselytizing as an illegal activity that creates divisiveness in society. Authorities sometimes seized religious tracts and teaching materials from local Christians 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 had been

seeking permission to do so for several years. Some believers bring religious materials into the country; however, these persons face possible arrest. Because of these restrictions, some approved Christian congregations complained of difficulties in obtaining Bibles and other religious materials. During the reporting period, several Christians were arrested at the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge for attempting to bring Bibles into the country. They were generally detained for a few days. 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; however, it required that such travelers notify authorities of the purpose of their travel and obtain permission in advance. In practice many persons of all faiths traveled abroad informally for religious training without obtaining advance permission or without informing authorities of the purpose of their travel. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs usually 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 Christians because of their religious beliefs or threatened to withhold official documentation unless they renounced their faith.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities continued to arrest or detain persons for their religious activities. Most detentions that occurred during the period covered by this report were short, varying from a few days to a few weeks. At least five Christians were detained for several days after attempting to bring Bibles into the country at the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were thirty religious prisoners: Two in Oudomsai Province, one under house arrest in Salavan Province, and twenty-seven in Bolikhamsai Province. Conditions in prisons were harsh; like other prisoners, religious detainees suffered from inadequate food rations, lack of medical care, and cramped quarters.

In 1999 authorities arrested two members of the Lao Evangelical Church in Oudomsai Province, Nyoht and Thongchanh, and charged them with treason and sedition, although their arrests appeared to have been for proselytizing. Nyoht was sentenced to twelve years in prison and Thongchanh to fifteen years. The men remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report despite appeals that their case be reviewed.

In July and August 2004 authorities in Kasi District, Vientiane Province, detained four LEC Christians for several months. The LEC maintained that they were detained because of their religious activities. In late 2004 authorities arrested two ethnic Yao Christians in Long San District of Vientiane Province for proselytizing, according to LEC sources.

In early 2005 authorities in Muang Phin District of Savannakhet Province detained twenty-four ethnic Brou Christians associated with the LEC at the district police office for several days in order to force their renunciation of faith. All but two of the men recanted their faith. These two men were imprisoned for approximately one year, but were reportedly released in early 2006. Officials in Sayaboury arrested an LEC pastor in June 2005, claiming that he had criticized members of the provincial administration. According to the LEC, he was released in late 2005.

In December 2005 authorities in Bolikhamsai Province detained a group of twenty-seven ethnic Hmong. The group—all minors but one—were residents at the Petchaboon displaced persons settlement in northern Thailand, and were irregularly sent into the country by Thai authorities who believed they were illegal immigrants. Some sources indicated that the group was Christian, and may have been detained in Laos in part due to its religious affiliation. These twenty-seven Hmong were still in detention at the end of the reporting period. Complicating this case, the Government refused to acknowledge it was holding the group.

Forced Religious Conversion

Efforts by local officials to force Christians to renounce their faith continued in some areas. In some cases, officials threatened religious minorities with arrest or expulsion from their villages if they did not comply, and on a number of occasions acted on these threats.

In October 2004 officials in Ban Phiengsavat Village of the former Saisomboun Special Zone reportedly expelled a group of nearly seventy Khmu Christians after the Christians refused to give up their beliefs. In February 2005 a second expulsion

took place in Ban Kok Pho Village of Bolikhamsai Province only a short distance from Ban Phiengsavat.

In April 2006 district officials in Salavan Province reportedly arrested an LEC member, Mr. Adern, who refused the village chief's order to recant his faith. His was reportedly one of four Christian families that had lived in the village, two of which had been forced to leave by the time of his arrest. Mr. Adern was under house arrest at the end of the reporting period. During the first ten 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.

Lands belonging to several Christian families in Ban Huang Village of Oudomsai Province were reportedly confiscated by the village chief and redistributed to other villagers in early 2006. Some other Christians who previously lived in the village were said to have moved to Phongsaly Province after being pressured by the village chief. According to Lao officials and the LEC, the land confiscation issue was resolved, but there was no clear explanation regarding what was done to resolve the situation.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 that of Christian minorities, continued to be marred by problems at the local level, with incidents of persecution occurring in many provinces.

In its official pronouncements in recent years, the Government called for conciliation and equality between religious faiths. The LFNC continued to instruct local officials on religious tolerance. Officials from the LFNC traveled with representatives of the LEC to several provinces to promote better understanding between LEC congregations and local officials.

The LEC continued to conduct an active program of public service during this reporting period, providing developmental assistance and organizing social welfare projects in several areas that had previously experienced religious intolerance. In conjunction with the LFNC, the LEC conducted meetings with officials and Christians in some villages where there had been religious tensions.

Although initially delayed by several months, the fact that the Government allowed Catholics to ordain a priest and a deacon in June 2006 was a positive development.

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 was no ecumenical movement to date. Local cultural mores generally instill respect for longstanding, well-known differences in belief. However, interreligious tensions arose on rare occasions within some minority ethnic groups, particularly in response to proselytizing or disagreements over rights to village resources. Efforts of some congregations to establish churches independent of the LEC or associated with denominations 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 evangelical Christians, to participate in Buddhist or animist religious ceremonies.

In December 2005 an LEC pastor, Mr. Aroun Varaphong, was murdered in Bolikhamsai Province after preaching at a pre-Christmas service. At the time of this report, there was reportedly no progress in the murder investigation.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. ambassador cited the promotion of religious freedom as one of her priorities after her arrival in Vientiane. She raised the issue of religious freedom in calls on all major figures in the Government. The ambassador also spoke directly about religious freedom with provincial governors in her visits to the provinces. Other embassy officers discussed religious freedom with a range of central and provincial officials.

The embassy maintained an ongoing dialogue with the Department of Religious Affairs in the LFNC. The embassy informed the LFNC of specific cases of arrest or harassment. The LFNC in turn used this information to intercede with local officials. Embassy representatives met with all major religious leaders in the country during the period covered by this report. Embassy officials actively encouraged reli-

gious 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 posted on its website material relevant to religious freedom in the country. In March 2006 a foreign affairs officer from the Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom visited the country and met with the LFNC to encourage greater religious freedom, registration of the Methodists as a recognized religious group, permission for the Catholic Church to proceed with a planned ordination, and the release of five religious prisoners. Moreover, both Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Eric John visited the country during the reporting period and encouraged greater religious freedom during their meetings with the prime minister and foreign minister. John also discussed religious freedom issues with the foreign minister during another visit in April 2006.

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 material change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The generally tolerant relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 127 thousand square miles, and its population was estimated at 25.6 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 Malays, accounting for approximately 55 percent of the population, are legally classified as Muslims at birth.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, but it also recognizes Islam as the country's religion. In practice the Government significantly restricts the observance of Islamic beliefs other than Sunni Islam. The Government provides financial support to an Islamic religious establishment composed of a variety of governmental, quasi-governmental, and other institutions, and it indirectly provides more limited funds to non-Islamic communities. State governments impose Islamic religious law on Muslims in some cultural and social matters but generally do not interfere with the religious practices of non-Muslim communities. Prime Minister Abdullah is a proponent of moderate, progressive "Islam Hadhari" (literally "civilizational Islam"). Some observers believe support for this policy contributed to his 2004 election victory over the opposition Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), which advocated a stricter Islamic agenda.

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).

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. Various religious groups were not recognized as such by the Government, and they sometimes registered themselves under the Companies Act to operate legally. In June 2005 nine Falun Gong practitioners were fined for

committing technical violations of the Companies Act, such as failure to provide minutes of the organization's meetings within the required time frame.

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.

In February 2005 the Malaysian Bar Council organized a forum to discuss the creation of an interfaith commission aimed at promoting better understanding and mutual respect among the country's religious groups. Several groups claiming to represent mainstream Islam refused to participate in the forum on the grounds that an interfaith commission would "weaken Islam." The Government subsequently announced that an interfaith commission was not necessary but stated that interfaith dialogue should be encouraged.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In practice Muslims are not permitted to convert to another religion. In several recent rulings secular courts ceded jurisdiction to Shari'a courts in matters involving conversion to or from Islam. In July 2004 the Federal Court, the country's highest court, upheld a 2002 lower court ruling that only the Shari'a courts were qualified to determine whether a Muslim has become an apostate. In September 2005 the country's second-highest court, the Court of Appeal, denied the request of a Muslim who had converted to Christianity to change the religion designated on her national identity card. The Court of Appeal ruled that a Shari'a court must first approve a request by a Muslim citizen to convert to another religion. In practice Shari'a courts routinely denied such requests. Citing the case as "a matter of general public interest," the Federal Court agreed in April 2006 to hear the woman's appeal and address the degree to which Shari'a courts have jurisdiction over determinations of Muslim apostasy.

In December 2005 a trial court ruled that it lacked jurisdiction over Shari'a court decisions on matters that concerned Islamic family law. The case involved 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, claiming that there was no clear evidence that he had converted to Islam, struggled with Islamic authorities over which religion's rites should govern his burial. A Shari'a court ruled that the Hindu man was a Muslim and ordered his burial according to Muslim rites. As a non-Muslim, the wife took her case to the secular High Court, but the court ruled that it had no jurisdiction to hear the case because it involved a Muslim. She then filed an appeal, which was pending as of June 30, 2006. In January 2006, following the death of an eighty-nine-year-old ethnic Malay woman who had practiced Buddhism her entire adult life, Islamic religious authorities requested a Shari'a court to rule whether the woman's Buddhist family could be allowed to bury her according to Buddhist rites. The Shari'a court ruled in favor of the woman's family.

In January 2006 the non-Muslim members of the cabinet presented a memorandum to the prime minister calling for a review of constitutional provisions affecting the legal rights of non-Muslims. Following protests from several Muslim leaders within the governing coalition and a commitment by the prime minister to address the non-Muslim ministers' concerns in future cabinet meetings, the ministers withdrew their memorandum. The prime minister stated publicly that the country's constitution provides sufficient protection of religious freedom and should therefore not be reviewed or amended in that regard.

Control of mosques is exercised at the state level rather than by the federal government; state religious authorities appoint imams to mosques and provide guidance on the content of sermons. While practices vary from state to state, both the Government and the opposition PAS have attempted to use mosques in the states they control to deliver politically oriented messages. In recent years, several states controlled by the governing coalition announced measures including banning opposition-affiliated imams from speaking at mosques, more vigorously enforcing existing restrictions on the content of sermons, replacing mosque leaders and governing committees thought to be sympathetic to the opposition, and threatening to close down unauthorized mosques with ties to the opposition. Similarly the state government of Kelantan, controlled by the PAS, reportedly restricts imams affiliated with the Barisan Nasional (the ruling coalition) from speaking in mosques.

The Government opposed what it considered "deviant" interpretations of Islam, maintaining that allegedly deviant groups' views endanger national security. According to the Government's Islamic Development Department's (IDD) website, fifty-

six deviant teachings had been identified and prohibited to Muslims as of June 2006. They included Shi'a, transcendental meditation, and Baha'i teachings, among others. The Government asserted that "deviationist" teachings could cause divisions among Muslims. The IDD has established written guidelines concerning what constitutes "deviationist" behavior or belief. State religious authorities, in making their determinations on these matters, have 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. Neither the Government nor religious authorities provided data on the number of such persons who have been subjected to "rehabilitation."

The Government continued to monitor the activities of the Shi'a minority.

Proselytizing of Muslims by members of other religions is strictly prohibited, although proselytizing of non-Muslims faces no similar obstacles. In April 2005 two foreign Christian missionaries were arrested after distributing religious materials in front of a mosque. They were charged with "disturbing the peace in a religious manner." After ten days the Government dismissed the charges against the two men and released them.

The Government restricts the distribution in peninsular Malaysia of Malay-language translations of the Bible, Christian tapes, and other printed materials. In April 2005 the prime minister declared that copies of the Malay-language Bible must have the words "Not for Muslims" printed on the front and could be distributed only in churches and Christian bookshops. The distribution of Malay-language Christian materials faces few restrictions in East Malaysia. According to the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs (MCCBCHS), the Government restricted visas for foreign clergy under the age of forty to inhibit "militant clergy" from entering the country. While representatives of non-Muslim groups did not sit on the immigration committee that approved visa requests, the MCCBCHS was asked for its recommendations. In August 2005 the Selangor state religious authorities announced their decision to withhold support for visa applications by foreign Muslim imams and religious teachers. Local media reported that the decision was largely targeted at the ethnic Indian Muslim community, in an effort to increase the number of "homegrown" imams. Ethnic Indian religious leaders expressed concern that some mosques and religious schools might need to be closed.

The Government prohibits publications that it alleges might incite racial or religious disharmony. In 2004 it prohibited Muslims from viewing the movie "The Passion of the Christ" but allowed non-Muslims to view the film at private screenings.

The Government continued to require all Muslim civil servants to attend government-approved religion classes.

State governments have authority over the building of non-Muslim places of worship and the allocation of land for non-Muslim cemeteries. Approvals for building permits sometimes were granted very slowly. Some religious groups complained that state policies and local decisions restrict the construction of non-Muslim places of worship. Muslim residents of a neighborhood in Kajang objected to the building of a church in a residential area that was predominantly Muslim. In May 2005 the local municipal council determined that the proposed site was designated for residential building and rejected the church's application. A Roman Catholic church delayed for more than fourteen years by the state government of Selangor was officially opened in September 2005. Church officials publicly accused state and local officials of intentionally delaying construction of the church by demanding relocation of proposed building sites and revoking previously approved building plans and designs.

Unregistered religious statues and houses of worship may be demolished by the state. Several nongovernmental organizations (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. In March 2006 state officials in Negeri Sembilan announced their intention to demolish an unregistered Hindu temple believed to be 150 years old. The temple sits on state-owned land that was zoned for road construction in 1956. Approximately 300 worshippers regularly use the temple. In May 2006 the temple sought a court injunction against the pending demolition. The court case remained open as of June 30, 2006.

In family and religious matters, all Muslims are subject to Shari'a law. Some women's rights advocates asserted that women faced discriminatory treatment in Shari'a courts due to prejudicial interpretation of Islamic family law and the lack of uniformity in the implementation of such laws among the various states.

Government-controlled bodies exerted pressure upon non-Muslim women to wear headscarves. In November 2005 the minister of higher education stated that non-Muslim women students at the International Islamic University of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur must wear headscarves when attending lectures and during graduation ceremonies. In March 2006 the leader of the Royal Malaysian Police stated that all female police officers, including non-Muslims, should wear headscarves during public ceremonies.

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. In Kelantan, the PAS also lost ground in 2004 but remained in control of the state legislature by a narrow margin. Many observers interpreted the result as a rejection by voters of the call by the PAS for the establishment of an Islamic state and of the strict form of Islam that it promoted. 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. The PAS-led government allowed operation of gender segregated cinemas and concert venues, fashion shows limited to female attendees, and billiard/snooker centers for men only.

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." In July 2004 the Federal Court dismissed an appeal by four followers of Ayah Pin, leader of a nonviolent religious group in Terengganu known as the Sky Kingdom. The appeal by the four former Muslims sought 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. In July 2005 seventy Sky Kingdom members were arrested at the sect's main compound in Terengganu. In August 2005 all nonresidential buildings on the compound were destroyed on the instruction of state officials, who asserted that nonfarming structures had been built on property zoned exclusively for agricultural use. The remaining individuals living on the compound were ordered to vacate their residences. No Shari'a law-qualified attorneys initially agreed to defend the Sky Kingdom followers, forcing postponement of their hearings. Ayah Pin and one of his four wives remained at large as of June 30, 2006, and were sought by religious authorities for supporting "deviant" religious practices. One of the seventy arrested Sky Kingdom followers agreed to undergo religious rehabilitation; the cases against the other Ayah Pin followers were pending 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 of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally tolerant relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

Non-Muslim ecumenical and interfaith organizations in the country include the MCCBCHS, the Malaysian Council of Churches, and the Christian Federation of Malaysia. Muslim organizations generally do not participate in ecumenical bodies. In 2005 several Muslim NGOs boycotted and condemned the proposed formation of an interfaith council on the claimed grounds that "matters concerning Islam could only be discussed by 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.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 70 square miles, and the estimated population in 2005 was 56,417. Major religious groups included 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. Bukot Non Jesus (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 accounted for 1.5 percent of the population, and another 1.4 percent belonged to religious groups not named in the 1999 census, but which local religious leaders believed to consist of Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, and the Salvation Army.

There were foreign missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Roman Catholic Church, Seventh-day Adventists, the Baptist Church, and other groups. Only Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses proselytized through home visits. Religious schools were operated by the Roman Catholic Church, United Church of Christ, Assemblies of God, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Baptist Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

Good Friday, Gospel Day, and Christmas are official religious holidays.

There are no prerequisites for registering religious groups and there are no penalties for not registering. Missionary groups are allowed to operate freely.

There is no religious education in public schools, and there are no opening or closing prayers during the school day. However, most extracurricular school events begin and end with a nondenominational Christian prayer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Christianity was a dominant social and cultural force. Governmental and social functions typically opened and closed 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately two hundred and sixty square miles, and its population is an estimated one hundred thousand, according to the 2000 census. The country consists of 607 islands spread over a two thousand 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, were present in every state. Most Protestant groups trace their roots to American Congregationalist missionaries. On the island of Kosrae, the population was approximately 7,800; 95 percent were Protestants. On Pohnpei, the population of thirty-five thousand was evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics. On Chuuk and Yap, an estimated 60 percent were Catholic and 40 percent were Protestant. Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvation Army, Assemblies of God, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and the Baha'i Faith also were represented. There was a small group of Buddhists on Pohnpei. Attendance at religious services was generally high; churches were well supported by their congregations and played a significant role in civil society.

Most immigrants were Filipino Catholics who have joined local Catholic churches. The Filipino Iglesia Ni Cristo also had a church in Pohnpei.

In the 1890s, on the island of Pohnpei, intermissionary conflicts and the conversion of clan leaders resulted in religious divisions along clan lines, which persist today. More Protestants live on the western side of the island, while more Catholics live on the eastern side.

Missionaries of many faiths worked within the country, including Catholics, Baptists, and Mormons.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

Christmas and Good Friday are national religious days.

Foreign missionary groups operated without hindrance in all four states. There were numerous church-sponsored schools, and religious groups operated radio stations broadcasting religious programming on Pohnpei and Yap.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relations among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Churches have formed an Inter-Denominational Council to address social problems within the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its policy to promote human rights. Representatives of the U.S. embassy regularly meet with the leaders of religious communities. The embassy also worked closely with church-related nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in its efforts to promote good governance.

In 2005 church-related NGOs implemented two Pacific Island Fund grants. In addition a church-owned radio station was installing a Voice of America-provided satellite receiver so that it could relay VOA programming. An embassy nomination enabled a local cleric to visit the United States as part of an educational exchange that focused on the relationship between religion and community.

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 during the period covered by this report.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 604,247 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.83 million. Buddhism and the country's traditions are tied closely, and almost all ethnic Mongolians (93 percent of the population) practiced 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, active interest in the practice of Buddhism grew. The Buddhist community was not homogeneous, and there were several competing schools.

Kazakhs, most of whom are Muslim, were the largest ethnic minority, constituting approximately 4 percent of the population nationwide and 85 percent in the western province, Bayan-Olgiy. Kazakhs operated Islamic schools for their children. They sometimes received financial assistance from religious organizations in Kazakhstan and Turkey.

Although nationwide statistics were lacking, there was a small number of Christians, including Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, and Protestants. In the capital, Ulaanbaatar, approximately thirty thousand citizens, or 3 percent of the registered population of the city, practiced Christianity.

Some citizens practiced shamanism, but there were no reliable statistics on their number.

Foreign missionary groups included Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, evangelical Protestants, Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'is.

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 that seek to register faced 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 otherwise did not 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 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 possesses the ultimate authority to approve an organization's application, this appears to be largely pro forma. In practice local assemblies 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. There were 357 registered places of worship, including 206 Buddhist, 127 Christian, 5 Baha'i, and 5 Muslim. During the period covered by this report, twelve new Christian churches and two Buddhist temples were registered in Ulaanbaatar.

Contacts with coreligionists outside the country are allowed. In 1993 the Government abolished legal restrictions on such contacts, and human rights sources stated that there were no de facto efforts to restrict normal contacts and interchange.

Religious instruction is not permitted in public schools. There is a school to train Buddhist lamas in Ulaanbaatar.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While the law does not prohibit proselytizing by registered religious groups, it limits such activity by forbidding the use of material incentives, pressure, or deceptive methods to introduce religion. A Ministry of Education directive bans mixing foreign language or other training with religious teaching or instruction. Monitoring of the ban, particularly in the capital area, is strict. 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.

Registration and reregistration are burdensome for all religious groups. The length and documentation requirements of the process discourage some organizations from applying. Others can take years to win approval. 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. One church, approved in May 2006, had been pursuing registration since 2003. City authorities approved twelve churches in May 2006. No churches were known to have been refused registration in Ulaanbaatar during the reporting period. Although a nongovernmental organization (NGO) previously reported that government officials had stated that sixty Christian churches registered in Ulaanbaatar were sufficient, there were no similar reported statements during the reporting period.

Christian groups previously reported that authorities in Tov aimag (province), near Ulaanbaatar, routinely denied registration to churches. In December 2005 the aimag legislative body denied registration to eight churches on the same day it approved two Buddhist temples. No churches were registered in the aimag.

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. In March 2006 government officials warned three unregistered churches in Tov aimag and one in Selenge aimag to cease their activities. Visa problems especially affect Christian churches, many of which depend on foreign clergy. During the registration process in Ulaanbaatar, in past years some groups encountered demands by midlevel city officials for money or charitable activities in their district; however, no such demands were reported in recent years.

Ulaanbaatar authorities were reportedly helpful in assisting the Muslim community in the capital in 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Citizens generally were tolerant of the beliefs of others, and there were no reports of religiously motivated violence; however, because in the past humanitarian assistance was accompanied by proselytizing activity, there was some friction between Christian missionary groups and citizens. Some conservatives have criticized foreign influences on youth and children, including foreign religions and the alleged use of material incentives to attract believers.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials discussed with authorities registration difficulties encountered by Christian groups. These discussions focused attention on U.S. concern for religious freedom and opposition to corruption; the discussions resulted in a clarification of the requirements for registration. Embassy officials also continued to discuss registration requirements with faith-based NGOs.

The U.S. embassy maintains regular contact with Buddhist, Muslim, Protestant, Catholic, and Mormon religious groups. In addition the embassy met with representatives of U.S.-based religious and humanitarian organizations. 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.

There was no significant change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government placed some restrictions on the practice of religious and missionary work by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses. Most adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were foreign workers previously employed by the government-owned Nauru Phosphate Corporation (NPC) and were stranded in the country awaiting repatriation. The Jehovah's Witnesses say that most of their few followers are native Nauruans.

There were no indications of general societal discrimination against particular religious denominations; however, there has been resistance by some elements of the Nauru Protestant Church (the country's dominant religious group) to denominations perceived as foreign, in particular to the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately eight square miles, and its population is an estimated ten thousand, including the unemployed foreign workers. Christianity was the primary religion. According to the 2002 census, approximately two-thirds of Christians are Protestant, and the remainder was Roman Catholic. Some of the ethnic Chinese on the island, approximately 8 percent of the population, may be Confucian, Buddhist or Taoist.

Foreign missionaries introduced Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There were a few active Christian missionary organizations, including representatives of the Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic faiths.

Approximately two-thirds of the foreign workers formerly employed in the phosphate industry practiced different faiths from those of native-born citizens, although the majority was thought to be Christian. Both the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses have won converts among such workers, some of whom held religious serv-

ices in their company-supplied housing. The Jehovah's Witnesses said they also had followers among the native population. Both faiths had only small numbers of adherents on the Island, and there was no missionary work in recent years.

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. Under the constitution, the rights to freedom of conscience, expression, assembly, and association may be restricted by any law that "makes provision which is reasonably required...in the interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health." The Government has cited this provision as a basis for preventing foreign churches from proselytizing native-born citizens.

There is no state religion.

Officials of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons have been informed that, under the provisions of the Birth, Death, and Marriage Ordinance, their churches must register with the Government to operate in an official capacity, which includes proselytizing, building churches, holding religious services in the NPC housing facilities, and otherwise practicing their religion. Only two long-standing Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church are officially registered to operate. 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 Church reported that it submitted a registration request in 1999; however, the Government has not responded either to the original request or to follow-up inquiries. Officials of Jehovah's Witnesses have not submitted a request for registration.

Christmas and Easter are official religious holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government prevented Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormon officials from visiting in their official capacities and on occasion prevented them from visiting at all. Although adherents could practice their religious beliefs privately, they were discouraged from any form of missionary work 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.

Since 2000, visiting ministers or missionaries from the Jehovah's Witnesses have not been permitted to enter the country. Mormon officials were similarly refused entry. The president of the Suva Fiji Mission, who is responsible for ministering to the Nauru community, said the Government discouraged him from applying for a visa. A Mormon missionary in Kiribati formally applied for a visa to enter the country to minister to the community but received no response.

There was a multidenominational religious facility for foreign phosphate workers in the NPC housing area; however, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses were not permitted to use this facility for religious services or meetings.

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

No evidence existed of general societal discrimination against specific religious denominations. Mormons 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 some social strains, and there has been resistance by some elements of the Nauru Protestant Church to religions perceived as foreign, in particular to the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain an embassy in the country, the U.S. ambassador to Fiji is also accredited to the Government 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. Embassy officials have discussed the importance of religious freedom with ministers in the reformist Scotty Government since its return to office in 2004.

NEW ZEALAND

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with an area of approximately 99,000 thousand square miles, and its population is an estimated 4,140,000. The country is predominantly Christian but was becoming more religiously diverse. According to the 2001 census, approximately 55 percent of citizens identified themselves as Christian or members of individual Christian denominations. Three major Christian denominations: Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist experienced a decline in membership between 1996 and 2001, while the Roman Catholic Church showed a slight increase. The Maori Christian churches, which integrate Christian tenets with precolonial Maori beliefs and include Ratana and Ringatu, experienced significant growth. The number of Pentecostals declined by an estimated 19 percent between 1996 and 2001 to less than 1 percent of the population. During the same period non-Christian religions continued to show strong growth rates, driven primarily by immigration.

According to 2001 census data, percentages of religious affiliation were: Anglican, 15.2 percent; Roman Catholic, 12.7 percent; Presbyterian, 10.9 percent; Christian (no more specific identification), 5 percent; Methodist, 3.1 percent; Baptist, 1.3 percent; Ratana (a Maori/Christian group with services in the Maori language), 1.3 percent; Buddhist, 1.1 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 1 percent; and Hindu, 1 percent. There were also more than ninety religious groups that each constituted less than 1 percent of the population. In addition 26.8 percent stated that they had no religious affiliation, 6.2 percent objected to answering the survey question, and 5.5 percent did not state affiliation.

The indigenous Maori (estimated at 15 percent of the population) tended to be followers of Presbyterianism, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), or Maori Christian faiths such as Ratana and Ringatu. The Auckland statistical area, which accounts for approximately 30 percent of the country's population, exhibited the greatest religious diversity. Farther south on the North Island, and on the South Island, the percentage of citizens who identified themselves with Christian faiths increased, while those affiliated with non-Christian religions decreased.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 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 re-

ligious 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 326 of the 2,607 schools of all levels were integrated schools with this designation. As of July 2005 there were 238 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.

In 2003, the Office of Human Rights Proceedings (an independent component of the Human Rights Commission) settled a case in which the employer of a complainant (a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church) breached the Human Rights Act of 1993 by requiring the latter to work on his Saturday Sabbath. The employer acknowledged breaching the act, paid a fine of $25,000 (NZD 40,000), awarded a one-time six-week leave benefit, and agreed to an alternative roster so that the complainant would not be required to work on Saturdays.

For the year ended June 30, 2005, the Human Rights Commission received 1,862 complaints having an element of unlawful discrimination under the Human Rights Act. 4.3 percent of these complaints were classified as unlawful discrimination on grounds of religious belief.

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 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 small but growing non-Christian communities have called for the Government to take into account the country's increasingly diverse religious makeup and offer greater holiday flexibility. In response the Government removed some constraints on trade associated with the Christian faith. In 2001, it enacted legislation that permits several types of businesses to remain open on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. These businesses included those providing essential supplies, convenience items, and food and drink.

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.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Incidents of religiously motivated violence were 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.

In November 2005, a man was convicted and sentenced to fifteen months' imprisonment for abuse directed at Muslims at a bus stop and on a bus in South Dunedin. Also in November 2005, a court sentenced two former members of the National Front, a white supremacist group, to twelve months' imprisonment for vandalizing mosques in Auckland following the July 2005 subway bombings in London. In July 2005, the person charged in 2004 for sending racist letters to members of Welling-

ton's Somali community and other Muslims was convicted of harassment, and in September 2005 he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

The government-funded Human Rights Commission actively promoted tolerance on the issue of religious freedom.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy maintains contacts with representatives of the country's various religious communities, and includes them at its sponsored events.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

An archipelago of more than three hundred islands in the western Pacific Ocean, the country has an area of 188 square miles, and its population is approximately twenty-thousand persons; 70 percent live in the temporary capital, Koror. There were nineteen Christian denominations. Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion; approximately 65 percent of the population was members. Estimates of other religious groups with a sizable membership included the Evangelical Church, two thousand; Seventh-day Adventists, one thousand; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), three hundred; and Jehovah's Witnesses, ninety. Modekngei, which embraces both animist and Christian beliefs and is unique to the country, had approximately eight-hundred adherents. There also was a small group of Bangladeshi Muslims and a primarily Catholic Filipino labor force (approximately five-thousand persons). A large percentage of citizens did not actively practice their faith.

Since the arrival of Jesuit priests in the early nineteenth century, foreign missionaries have been active; some have been in the country for many years. A number of groups had missionaries in the country on proselytizing or teaching assignments, including the Apostolic Foundation, Baha'i Faith, Roman Catholic Church, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Evangelical Church, High Adventure Ministries, Iglesia Ni Cristo, Jehovah's Witnesses, Korean Church, Korea Presbyterian Church, Pacific Missionary Aviation, Palau Assembly of God, and Seventh-day Adventists. The Seventh-day Adventist and Evangelical churches had 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 does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not promote or restrain religious activities; however, the Government regulates the establishment of religious organizations by requiring them to obtain charters as nonprofit organizations from the Office of the Attorney General. This registration process is not protracted, and the Government did not deny registration to any group during the period covered by this report. As nonprofit organizations, churches and missions are exempt from paying taxes.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain a missionary permit at the Office of Immigration; however, there were no reports that the Government denied these permits to any persons during the period covered by this report.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. There is government financial support for religious schools that may be requested by rep-

resentatives of any religion. The Government also provides small-scale financial assistance to cultural organizations.

The Government recognizes Christmas as a national religious holiday. There is active participation by the majority of the country's religious groups in Easter and Christmas services. Even though the Government does not sponsor religious groups or promote religious activities, activities such as national and state events or public and private graduations are always conducted with a prayer to open the ceremonies.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, there is a ban on work permits for citizens of Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. The ban stemmed from a 1998 decision by the Division of Labor to deny work permits to Bangladeshi citizens following complaints from employers that workers' religious practices interfered with activities in the workplace and in living arrangements of employing families. A similar ban went into effect in 2001 for citizens of India and Sri Lanka. Workers from these countries present in the country at the time of the decision were not expelled, and there 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The various religious organizations maintained cordial relations with each other.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials also maintain regular contacts with the various religious communities.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation with an area of 280,773 square miles, and its population is approximately 5,930,400. According to the 2000 census, the churches with the largest number of members were Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran, United, and Seventh-day Adventist churches. At that time, 96 percent of citizens identified themselves as members of a Christian church. Minority religions included the Baha'i Faith and Islam; there were approximately forty thousand Baha'is, according to Baha'i leadership, and one to two thousand Muslims. Many citizens combined their Christian faith with some traditional indigenous practices.

Traditional Christian churches proselytized on the island in the nineteenth century. Colonial governments initially assigned different missions to different geographic areas. Since territory in the country is aligned strongly with language group and ethnicity, this colonial policy led to the identification of certain churches with certain ethnic groups. However, churches of all denominations are now found in all parts of the country. The Muslim community has a mosque in the capital of Port Moresby.

Nontraditional Christian and non-Christian religious groups were 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 was high. Pentecostal churches in particular have found converts within the congregations of the more established churches, and many movements and faiths that proselytize had representatives in the country. New Tribes Mission was the largest single missionary group, with approximately 450 missionaries in the country. The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in the country during the reporting period. SIL partnered with the Department of Education and communities in linguistic research, literacy, Bible translation, Scripture use, and training. SIL has produced New Testaments and one complete Bible in 157 of the languages of the country.

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 of the country's schools and many of its health services, and the Government provides support for those institutions. At independence, the Government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel with which to take over these institutions and agreed to subsidize their operations on a per pupil or per patient basis. The Government also pays the salaries of national teachers and health staff. Although the education and health infrastructures continue to rely heavily on church-run institutions, some schools and clinics have closed periodically because they did not receive the promised government support. These problems are due in part to endemic financial management issues in the Government.

Immigrants and noncitizens are free to practice their religion, and foreign missionary groups are permitted to proselytize and engage in other missionary activities.

Religious holidays include Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas Day.

It is the policy of the Department of Education to set aside one 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 prevalent in the country, and it was not known if non-Christian religious groups had representatives to teach lessons.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

As new missionary movements proliferated, representatives and individuals of some established churches questioned publicly 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 and Union Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, and United churches, and the Salvation Army. In addition fifteen parareligious organizations, including the Young Women's Christian Association, participated in its activities; however, the self-financing council has only Christian affiliates. The ecumenical work of the Council of Churches is confined primarily to cooperation among churches on social welfare projects.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. ambassador continued discussions with the Council of Churches and individual church leaders. The ambassador and embassy officials met with religious leaders to discuss their role in social issues and continued to meet regularly with U.S. citizen missionaries of many denominations.

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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The armed insurgent Muslim group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continued to seek greater autonomy. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government and the MILF maintained a cease-fire and continued their peace dialogue, brokered by the Government of Malaysia. An eventual settlement could include special recognition of Islamic education and expanded recognition of Islamic law, among other provisions sought by some Muslims.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is some ethnic, religious, and cultural discrimination against Muslims by Christians. This, combined with economic disparities, contributed to persistent conflict in certain provinces.

The U.S. embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy actively encouraged the peace process between the Government and MILF, while the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) provided some technical assistance.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 115,831 square miles, and its population is approximately eighty-five million.

Roman Catholics, the largest religious group, were estimated to comprise 80 to 85 percent of the total population. El Shaddai, a local charismatic lay movement affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, was headquartered in Manila and claims a domestic membership of six million.

The largest minority religion was Islam. The most recent census, conducted in 2000, estimated that the Muslim population was between 5 percent and 9 percent of the total population. Muslims resided principally on Mindanao and nearby islands. Most belonged to the Sunni branch of Islam. A very small number of Shi'a believers lived in the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Zamboanga del Sur on Mindanao.

Among the numerous Protestant and other Christian denominations were Seventh-day Adventists, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines, Assemblies of God, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Philippine (Southern) Baptist denominations. In addition there were three churches established by local religious leaders: The Philippine Independent Church or "Aglipayan," the Iglesia ni Cristo (Church of Christ), and the Ang Dating Daan (an offshoot of Iglesia ni Cristo).

A majority of indigenous peoples, estimated to number between twelve million and sixteen million, reportedly were Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant).

However, many indigenous groups mixed elements of their native religions with Christian beliefs and practices.

Christian missionaries worked actively throughout the country, including within Muslim communities in most parts of western Mindanao. Conversion of Christians to Islam was most typical among workers who have lived and worked in an Islamic country, largely because converting brings social and economic benefits while abroad. Many of these "converts of convenience" remained 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 Government does not restrict adherents of other religions in practicing their faith.

The law requires organized religions to register with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and with the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to establish tax-exempt status. 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 Government does not provide direct subsidies to institutions for religious purposes, even for the extensive school systems maintained by religious orders and church groups.

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, Saudi Arabia; 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 worked with Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) leaders on a variety of development programs to reintegrate former MNLF fighters through jobs and business opportunities. The integration of approximately 7,500 ex-MNLF fighters into the armed forces and police has helped reduce suspicion between Christians and Muslims.

In March 2004 peace advocates, military troops, and government officials declared Jolo Municipality in Sulu Province a zone of peace under the UN Multi-Donor Program (UNMDP). In addition to Jolo, other towns in North Cotabato, Maguindanao, and Zamboanga del Norte provinces have been declared peace zones. During the reporting period, the peace zones in these areas—with the exception of Sulu—have experienced a dramatic decline in the number of armed encounters between government forces and Muslim insurgents. The reduction of hostilities reduced tensions between Christians and Muslims in these areas.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools with the written consent of parents, provided there is no cost to the Government. Based on a traditional policy of promoting moral education, local public schools give church groups the opportunity to teach moral values during school hours. Attendance is not mandatory, and various churches share classroom space. The Government also allows interested groups to distribute religious literature in public schools.

By law, public schools must ensure that the religious rights of students are protected. Muslim students are allowed to wear their head coverings (hijab), and Muslim girls are not required to wear shorts during physical education classes.

In many parts of Mindanao, Muslim students routinely attend Catholic schools from elementary to university level; however, these students are not required to receive Catholic religious instruction.

In November 2005 the University of the Philippines (UP) agreed to the construction of a mussalah (prayer room) and a dormitory for Muslim students inside the campus.

Approximately 14 percent of the school population in Mindanao attended Islamic schools. Estimates of the number of madrassahs (Islamic schools) across the country varied widely; government officials estimated the number at more than two thousand. Of these, more than half were located in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). A total of 1,140 madrassahs seeking financial assistance from local and foreign donors were registered with the OMA, while only 40 are registered with the Department of Education. Most madrassahs did not meet the department's

accreditation standards for curricula and adequate facilities. The Madrasa Development Coordinating Committee manages financial assistance to the madrassah system from local and international sources.

In September 2005, the Government began implementation of its unified curriculum, designed to integrate madrassahs into the national education system. Several private madrassahs began training educators to teach math, science, English, and Filipino, in addition to sectarian subjects. The Government hoped to certify Islamic schools that offer a full range of courses in the coming years, allowing their graduates to enter public high schools or colleges. In addition, public elementary schools that had at least twenty-five Muslim students were ordered to begin offering Arabic language instruction and classes on Islamic values.

In line with the Government's antiterrorism campaign, in April 2004 the president ordered the creation of a special Muslim police unit tasked to handle cases involving the arrest and investigation of Muslims. Some Muslims disagreed with the creation of the police group and branded it as a ploy to pit Muslims against Muslims, but the Government claimed it would ensure that the rights of Muslims are protected.

The Government's National Ecumenical Consultative Committee (NECCOM) fosters interfaith dialogue among major religious groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, Islam, Iglesia ni Cristo, the Philippine Independent Church (Aglipayan), and Protestant denominations. The Protestant organizations represented in the NECCOM are the National Council of Churches of the Philippines and the Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches. 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 religions or religious factions. However, Muslims—who are concentrated in many of the most impoverished provinces—complain that the Government has not made sufficient efforts to promote their economic development. Some Muslim religious leaders asserted that Muslims suffered from economic discrimination. Predominantly Muslim provinces in Mindanao lagged far behind the rest of the country in most aspects of socioeconomic development. Poverty levels in the ARMM were almost twice as high as the national average, with per capita income of $285 (P15,760) per year.

Intermittent government efforts to better integrate Muslims into the political and economic mainstream have achieved limited success. Many Muslims claimed that they continued to be underrepresented in senior civilian and military positions, and they cited the lack of proportional Muslim representation in national government institutions. There were currently 10 Muslim district representatives and 2 Muslim party list representatives in the House of Representatives out of a total of 236 members.

The Code of Muslim Personal Laws recognizes the Shari'a (Islamic law) civil law system as part of national law; however, it does not apply in criminal matters, and it applies only to Muslims. Some Muslim community leaders (ulamas) 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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On February 2, 2006, gunmen attacked Christian families on the southern island of Jolo, leaving six dead. One of the injured reported that men had knocked on their door in the early morning hours to inquire if the family was Christian or Muslim. Shortly thereafter, the men returned and opened fire on three homes. No arrests were made.

On February 13, 2006, Muslim residents of Isabela City, Basilan, staged a rally protesting a government order to demolish a mosque in the city and replace it with a commercial center. The mayor who ordered the demolition was shot and killed less than a month later, but it remained unclear if his death was connected to the destruction of the mosque.

On May 7, 2006, eleven inmates—including four Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) members—were injured at Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig during a riot sparked by an argument between a Muslim and a Christian inmate. Two prisoners were critically wounded.

Some progress was made since the last reporting period. On February 28, 2006, the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) released the results of the investigation into the March 2005 Camp Bagong Diwa jailbreak attempt, which ended in the deaths of twenty-two inmates, including several notorious regional commanders of the ASG. The CHR found the prison authorities used excessive force against the inmates. Some inmates who did not participate in the hostage-taking were summarily executed, and inmates were maltreated after the police assault. The CHR recommended that the Department of Justice create a committee to investigate the criminal liability of the assaulting police units.

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 seventeen suspected militants, including three women. However, police released fifteen of the suspects shortly after their arrest.

In April 2004, following a series of illegal raids on Muslim communities and arrests reportedly made without warrants, an estimated four thousand Muslims held a prayer vigil and protested in Metro Manila and accused the Government of targeting Muslim communities in its hunt for terrorists.

According to March 2004 press reports, the national security adviser claimed that Christians who had converted to Islam were the vanguard of terrorist activities in Metro Manila, Mindanao, and other areas and had links with the ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah, an Indonesia-based terrorist group. Afterwards, the president issued a statement that the campaign against terrorism should be carried out without any ethnic or religious bias.

Perceived religious discrimination sometimes leads to violence. In February 2005 a Moro rights advocate, his wife, and their son were killed in Sulu, allegedly by members of the AFP conducting counter-insurgency operations. Afterwards, the MNLF attacked the military camp in Sulu in retaliation for the deaths, setting off several weeks of intense fighting in the region, which displaced at least twenty-six thousand civilians.

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 ASG claimed to seek the immediate establishment of an independent Islamic state in the southwestern region. This terrorist group is primarily a loose collection of criminal-terrorist and kidnap-for-ransom gangs, and mainstream Muslim leaders rejected its claimed religious affiliation, strongly criticizing its actions as "un-Islamic." Most Muslims denounced terrorism as a means of achieving a satisfactory level of autonomy.

Attacks attributed to the ASG (estimated to have between 300 and 400 members) were numerous:

In August 10, 2005, two bombings wounded twenty-four persons in Zamboanga City, Mindanao. A third bomb was disarmed by police before it could detonate. In August 28, 2005, the bombing of a ferry at Lamitan, Basilan, left at least thirty wounded, including children.

In February 18, 2006, an explosion in a karaoke bar near an army camp in Jolo City, Sulu, killed one person and wounded twenty.

In March 27, 2006, the Sulu Consumers Cooperative store in Jolo City, Sulu, was bombed, leaving nine dead and more than twenty wounded.

In February 7, 2005, approximately 500 followers of jailed former MNLF leader Nur Misuari, reportedly in coordination with elements of ASG, attacked government forces in Jolo and other towns of Sulu.

The Government made some progress in response to the attacks. On October 28, 2005, a Makati City trial court sentenced to death an Indonesian and two other ASG members for their involvement in the February 14, 2005, Makati bus bombing, which killed 4 persons and injured 103.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there was some ethnic, religious, and cultural discrimination against Muslims by Christians.

Historically, Muslims have been alienated socially from the Christian majority, and some ethnic and cultural discrimination against Muslims has been recorded. The national culture often creates informal barriers whereby access to jobs or re-

sources is provided first to those of one's own family or group. Some employers have a biased expectation that Muslims will have lower education levels. Muslims reported that they had difficulty renting rooms in boarding houses or being hired for retail work if they use their real names or wear distinctive Muslim dress, and thus resorted to the use of Christian pseudonyms and Western clothing.

Over the past sixty 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.

A Social Weather Station survey conducted from August to September 2005 found that such attitudes may be shifting. The survey showed that 63 percent of Filipinos viewed Islam and Muslims favorably, an increase from past years. The survey also found that 67 percent of Filipinos believe Islam was a peaceful religion, and 44 percent agreed that Muslims were as trustworthy as any other Filipinos.

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), includes Roman Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant representatives joined together in an effort to support the Mindanao peace process. Leadership of human rights groups, trade union confederations, and industry associations typically represents many religious persuasions.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers met with representatives of all major faiths to discuss their concerns. In addition, the U.S. Government actively supported the Government's peace process with Muslim insurgents in Mindanao, which has the potential to contribute to peace and a better climate for interfaith cooperation.

The embassy also maintained active outreach with NGOs. The embassy hosted meetings of political and opinion leaders from the Muslim community to discuss the U.S. role in Mindanao. The Embassy continued to engage communities outside Manila.

For fiscal year 2005, 60 percent of United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) $85 million budget for the country went to programs in Mindanao, mostly to 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 when a USAID program helped twenty-eight thousand former MNLF members make the transition from fighters to productive farmers.

In an effort to promote religious education choices, the U.S Government funded a September 2005 NGO program that sent twenty-seven educators from private madrassahs in Mindanao to the United States to learn school administration and teaching methods for academic classes. Upon their return to Mindanao, these educators were given minigrants to implement small development projects in their respective madrassahs.

The embassy also sought to help religious leaders broaden their horizons. During the period covered in this report, the embassy sent both Muslim and Christian leaders to the United States on International Visitor Program grants.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, which is comprised of two relatively large islands, has a land area of 2,935 square kilometers, and its population was approximately 184,955. Most per-

sons lived on the island of Upolu, where the capital, Apia, is located. Nearly 100 percent of the population was Christian. The 2001 population and housing census revealed the following religious distribution: 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 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Assemblies of God congregations and a relative decline in the membership of the historically larger denominations. There were small congregations of other Protestant denominations such as Nazarene and Baptist. There were also members of the Baha'i Faith--the country hosts one of only seven Baha'i Houses of Worship in the world--and a few adherents of Islam. There were small congregations such as Jehovah's Witness with 0.8 percent of the population, Worship Centre 1.3 percent, Voice of Christ 0.4 percent, Full Gospel 0.8 percent, and Baptist Church 0.2 percent of the population. There were four theological colleges and Rhema, a Bible study school that was also growing in popularity. There were no reports of avowed atheists. The distribution of church membership was reflected throughout the country, but individual villages, particularly small ones, were only one or two of the major churches represented.

Foreign nationals and immigrants practice the same religions as native-born (Western) Samoans. There were no sizable foreign national or immigrant groups, with the exception of U.S. nationals from American Samoa. The major denominations that were present all had missionaries, as did the Baha'i Faith.

There was little or no correlation between religious differences and ethnic or political differences. Religious groups included citizens of various social and economic strata.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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, and the Government observes and enforces these provisions. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private as well as government actors, and laws are applied and enforced in a nondiscriminatory manner. Judicial remedies are accessible and effective.

The preamble to the constitution describes the country as, "An independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and traditions." Although Christianity is favored constitutionally, there is no official state religion.

There are no requirements for the recognition of a religious group or for licenses or registration. Missionaries operate freely, either as part of one of the established churches, or in conducting independent revival meetings.

The constitution provides freedom from unwanted religious indoctrination in schools but gives each denomination or religion the right to establish its own schools; these provisions are adhered to in practice. There are both religious and public schools; the latter do not have religious instruction as part of their curriculum. Pastoral schools in most villages provide religious instruction following school hours.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, White Monday, and Christmas are considered national religious holidays.

The Government takes steps to promote interfaith understanding by rotating ministers from various denominations who assist at government functions. Most government functions include a prayer at the opening.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The constitution grants each person the right to change religion or belief and to worship or teach religion alone or with others; however, in practice the matai (village chiefs) often choose the religious denomination of the aiga (extended family). Since 2000 there have been no reports that villages banished persons due to their practicing a religion different from that practiced by the village majority.

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

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

There is strong societal pressure at the village and local level to attend church, participate in church services and 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 IV. U.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 during the period covered by this report. The Government has banned the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church. The Government does not tolerate speech or actions that it deems could adversely affect racial or religious harmony.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 270 square miles, and its total population is approximately 4.2 million, of whom 3.5 million are citizens or permanent residents. According to a 2000 government survey, 85 percent of citizens and permanent residents professed some religious faith or belief. Of this group, 51 percent practiced Buddhism, Taoism, ancestor worship, or other faiths traditionally associated with the ethnic Chinese population. Approximately 15 percent of the population was Muslim, an estimated 15 percent Christian, and an estimated 4 percent Hindu. The remainder was composed of adherents of other religions, agnostics, and atheists. Among Christians, the majority of whom were ethnic Chinese; Protestants outnumbered Roman Catholics by slightly more than a two-to-one ratio. There were also small Sikh, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Jain communities.

Approximately 77 percent of the population was ethnic Chinese, 14 percent ethnic Malay, and 8 percent ethnic Indian. Nearly all ethnic Malays were Muslim, and most ethnic Indians Hindu. The ethnic Chinese population was divided among Buddhism, Taoism, and Christianity, or was agnostic or atheist.

Foreign missionaries were active in the country and include Roman Catholics, Mormons, and Baptists.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government 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 Singapore congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1972 and the Unification Church in 1982, making them unlawful societies. Such a designation makes it impossible to maintain a legal identity as a 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 publicly subsidized housing, have ready access to religious organizations traditionally associated with their ethnic groups by helping such institutions find space in these housing complexes. The Government maintains a semiofficial relationship with the Muslim community through the Islamic Religious Council (MUIS), which was set up under the Administration of Muslim Law Act. The MUIS advises the Government on concerns of the Muslim community, drafts the approved weekly sermon, regulates some Muslim religious matters, and oversees a mosque-building fund financed by voluntary payroll deductions. The constitution acknowledges Malay/Muslims 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. From 2003 to 2005, there were 142 applications for polygamous marriage, and 50 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.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools.

There are one or more official religious 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 generally promotes interfaith understanding indirectly by sponsoring activities to promote interethnic harmony. Because the primary ethnic minorities each are predominantly of one faith, government programs to promote ethnic harmony have implications for interfaith relations. On February 9, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong unveiled plans for a Community Engagement Program (CEP). The CEP's purpose would be to promote multiracial and interreligious harmony so that a strong foundation would be in place should a terrorist attack occur in Singapore. The CEP planned to include not only racial and religious groups, but also schools, businesses, and unions.

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 two thousand. Although the Court of Appeals in 1996 upheld the rights of members of Jehovah's Witnesses to profess, practice, and propagate their religious belief, and the Government does not arrest members for being believers, the result of deregistration has been to make public meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses illegal. Nevertheless, since the 1996 ruling, no charges have been brought against persons attending or holding Jehovah's Witness meetings in private homes.

The Government can also influence religious practice through the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act. The act was passed in 1990 and revised in 2001, in response to actions that the Government viewed as threats to religious harmony. This includes aggressive and "insensitive" proselytizing and "the mixing of religion and politics." The act established the Presidential Council on Religious Harmony, which reports to the minister of home affairs and is empowered to issue restraining orders against leaders and members of religious groups to prevent them from carrying out political activities, "exciting disaffection against" the Government, creating "ill will" between religious groups, or carrying out subversive activities. These orders place individuals on notice that they should not repeat such acts; contravening a restraining order can result in fines of up to $5,984 (S ten thousand) and up to two years' imprisonment for a first offense. The act also prohibits judicial review of its enforcement or of any possible denial of rights arising from it.

In April 2005 two Falun Gong adherents were found guilty of illegal assembly and distribution of video compact disks that had not been certified by the Board of Film Censors, and in October 2005 the High Court upheld their convictions, dismissing their appeals. The two women chose to serve prison sentences rather than pay fines of $12,092 (S twenty thousand) and $14,510 (S twenty-four thousand), respectively. They were released after a week once their families had paid the fines. The offenses were alleged to have taken place between November 2002 and March 2003. The law mandates police permits for outdoor assemblies of five or more persons and prohibits the distribution of films, including videodiscs, without a license.

Missionaries, with the exception of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and representatives of the Unification Church, are permitted to work and to publish and distribute religious texts. However, while the Government does not prohibit evangelical activities, in practice it discourages activities that might upset the balance of intercommunal relations. Authorities did not detain any Jehovah's Witnesses for proselytizing during the period covered by this report or the previous twelve-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 $1,176 (S two thousand) and jailed up to twelve months for a first conviction.

There were two government seizures of Jehovah's Witnesses literature during the period covered by this report. Four individuals were questioned by police and their literature was confiscated, but no charges were filed. There were no government seizures of Jehovah's Witnesses literature during the previous twelve-month period. In 2004 eleven individuals were detained briefly for attempting to bring Jehovah's Witnesses publications into the country from Malaysia. In each instance, the literature was confiscated but no charges were filed.

Three Jehovah's Witnesses students were suspended from school for refusing to sing the national anthem or participate in the flag ceremony during the period covered by this report. There were no such suspensions during the previous twelve-month period.

In response to concern from the Malay/Muslim community regarding the fate of madrassahs (Islamic religious schools), the Government temporarily exempted madrassah students from compulsory school attendance. If a madrassah does not meet minimum academic standards by 2008, its students would have to transfer either to a madrassah that does or to a national school, according to local press reports.

At the end of the period covered by this report, there were fifteen members of Jehovah's Witnesses incarcerated in the armed forces detention barracks because they refused to carry out the legal obligation for all male citizens to serve in the armed forces. Of these, four began their sentence during the period covered by this report. There were no known conscientious objectors other than members of Jehovah's Witnesses during the period covered by this report. The initial sentence for failure to comply with the military service requirement is fifteen months' imprisonment, to which twenty-four 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 two-year obligation, results in forty-day sentences; a twelve-month sentence is usual after four such refusals. All of the Jehovah's Witnesses in detention were incarcerated for failing to perform their initial National Service obligations and expect to serve a total of thirty-nine months.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Nearly all ethnic Malay citizens are Muslim, and 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 pre-

vent 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. This limits the number of potential buyers and affects the price of the 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. The U.S. embassy maintains contacts with the various religious communities in the country.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 10,985 square miles and its population was approximately 538 thousand. Most citizens were members of the following Christian churches: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist. Traditional indigenous religious believers, consisting primarily of the Kwaio community on the island of Malaita, accounted for an estimated 5 percent of the population. Other groups, such as the Baha'i Faith, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Unification Church, and indigenous churches that have broken away from traditional Christian churches, comprised 2 percent. There were believed to be members of other religious groups within the foreign community who were free to practice their religions, but they were not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies. According to the most recent reports, there were over 200 Muslims in the country.

Christianity was brought to the country in the 19th and early 20th centuries by missionaries representing several Western churches: The Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the South Seas Evangelical Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the London Missionary Society (which became the United Church). Some foreign missionaries continued to work in the country. Except for the Roman Catholic Church, whose clergy was approximately 50 percent foreign, the clergy of the traditional churches was nearly entirely indigenous, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, United Church (Methodist), South Seas Evangelical Church, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Department of Home and Cultural Affairs has a nominal policymaking role concerning religion. It characterized this role, on one hand, as keeping a balance between constitutionally protected rights of religious freedom, free speech, and free expression and, on the other hand, maintaining public order. All religious institutions were required to register with the Government; however, there were no reports that registration was denied to any group.

In general the Government did not subsidize religion. However, several schools and health services in the country were built and continue to be operated by religious organizations. There were schools sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Melanesia, the United Church (Methodist), the South Seas Evangelical Church, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Upon independence, the Government recognized that it had neither the funds nor the personnel to take over these institutions and agreed instead to subsidize their operations.

The public school curriculum included thirty minutes of daily religious instruction, the content of which is agreed upon by the Christian churches; students whose

parents do not wish them to attend the class are excused. The Government subsidized church schools only if they aligned their curriculums with governmental criteria. Although non-Christian religions may be taught in the schools, there was no such instruction at present. 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 were taken on the Bible; however, religious oaths were forbidden by the constitution and cannot be required.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 object to the activities of nontraditional denominations and suggest that they be curtailed. However, society in general was tolerant of different religious beliefs and activities.

During 2003, Guadalcanal militants abducted a number of members of an Anglican religious order and killed seven of them. In June 2003 militant leader Harold Keke was arrested for these and other killings. In March 2005 Keke was convicted of the murder of Father Augustine Geve and sentenced to life imprisonment.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States Government does not have a permanent presence in the country; however, the U.S. embassy in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

THAILAND

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 faiths has not restricted the activities of unregistered religious groups. The Government officially limits the number of foreign missionaries that may work in the country, although unregistered missionaries 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. While separatist violence in the southernmost provinces continued to result in localized tensions between Buddhist and Muslim communities, religious practices were not significantly inhibited.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 198 thousand square miles, and its population is an estimated 64 million. According to the Government's National Statistics Office, approximately 94 percent of the population was Buddhist and 5 percent was Muslim; however, estimates by nongovernmental organizations, academics, and religious groups stated that approximately 85 to 90 percent of the population was

Theravada Buddhist and up to 10 percent of the population was Muslim. There were small animist, Christian, Confucian, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, and Taoist populations. According to the Religious Affairs Department (RAD), the numbers of atheists or persons who did not profess a religious faith made up less than 1 percent of the population.

The dominant religion was 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 outnumbered those of the Dhammayuttika school, an order that grew out of a nineteenth-century reform movement led by King Mongkut (Rama IV).

Islam was the dominant religion in four of the five southernmost provinces, which border Malaysia. The majority of Muslims were ethnic Malay, but the Muslim population encompassed groups of diverse ethnic and national origin, including descendants of immigrants from South Asia, China, Cambodia, and Indonesia. The RAD reported that there were 3,524 registered mosques in 64 provinces, of which 2,255 were located in the 5 southernmost provinces. According to the RAD, 99 percent of these mosques were associated with the Sunni branch of Islam. Shi'a mosques made up the remaining 1 percent.

According to RAD statistics, there are an estimated 438,600 Christians in the country, constituting 0.7 percent of the population. There were 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 was the Evangelical Foundation of Thailand. Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists were recognized by authorities as separate Protestant denominations and were organized under similar umbrella groups.

There were nine tribal groups (chao khao) recognized by the Government, with an estimated population of approximately 920 thousand persons. Syncretistic practices drawn from Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and spirit worship were common. The Sikh Council of Thailand estimated the Sikh community to have a population of approximately 70 thousand persons, most of which resided in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Nakhon Ratchasima, Pattaya, and Phuket. There were currently nineteen Sikh temples in the country. According to government statistics, there were an estimated 2,900 Hindus in the country, although Hindu organizations estimated the population to be closer to 10 thousand persons.

The ethnic Chinese minority (Sino-Thai) has retained some popular religious traditions from China, including adherence to popular Taoist beliefs. Members of the Mien hill tribe followed a form of Taoism.

Mahayana Buddhism was practiced primarily by small groups of Chinese and Vietnamese immigrants. There were more than 675 Chinese and Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist shrines and temples throughout the country.

Citizens 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. As of May 2006, there were 8,079 Dhammaduta working in the country. In addition, during the period covered by this report, the Government sponsored the international travel of another 1,038 Buddhist monks sent by their temples to disseminate religious information to 27 countries. Muslim organizations reported having small numbers of citizens working as missionaries in the country and abroad. Christian organizations reported much larger numbers of missionaries, both foreign and Thai, operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, it restricted the activities of some groups. The constitution requires that the monarch be a Buddhist. The state religion in effect is Theravada Buddhism; however, it is not officially designated as such.

The constitution states that discrimination against a person on the grounds of "a difference in religious belief" shall not be permitted. There was no significant pattern of religious discrimination during the period covered by this report. The Government maintained longstanding policies designed to integrate southern Muslim communities into society through developmental efforts and expanded educational opportunities, as well as policies designed to increase the number of appointments to local and provincial positions where Muslims traditionally have been underrepresented.

The constitution provides 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. 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 five thousand adherents, has a uniquely recognizable theology, and is not politically active. A religious organization also must be accepted into an officially recognized ecclesiastical group before the RAD will grant registration. During the period covered by this report, there were five such groups: The Buddhist community, the Muslim community, the Brahmin-Hindu community, the Sikh community, and the Catholic community, which includes four Protestant subgroups. Government registration confers some benefits, including access to state subsidies, tax-exempt status, and preferential allocation of resident visas for organization officials. However, since 1984 the Government has not recognized any new religious faiths. In practice, unregistered religious organizations operate freely, and the Government's practice of not recognizing any new religious faiths has not restricted the activities of unregistered religious groups.

The constitution requires the Government "to patronize and protect Buddhism and other religions." The State subsidizes activities of the three largest religious communities (Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian). The Government allocated approximately $56.5 million (2.2 billion baht) during fiscal year 2006 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 2005, the Government, through the RAD, allocated $1.03 million for Islamic organizations, $56,600 for Christian, Brahman-Hindu, and Sikh organizations. Also in 2006 RAD received, for the first time, a rotating budget of approximately $51.3 million (200 million baht) to be used to offer loans for Hajj-related travel.

The budgets for Buddhist and Muslim organizations included funds to support Buddhist and Muslim institutes of higher education, fund religious education programs in public and private schools, provide daily allowances for monks and Muslim clerics who hold administrative and senior ecclesiastical posts, and subsidize travel and health care for monks and Muslim clerics. This figure also included an annual budget for the renovation and repair of Buddhist temples and Muslim mosques, the maintenance of historic Buddhist sites, and the daily upkeep of the central mosque in Pattani. Catholic and Protestant groups can request government support for renovation and repair work but do not receive a regular budget to maintain church buildings, nor do they receive government assistance to support their clergy. In 2006 the Government provided approximately $36,000 for restoration of Christian churches. Private donations to registered religious organizations are tax deductible.

Religious instruction is required in public schools at both the primary, (grades one through six, and secondary, grades seven through twelve, education levels. The Ministry of Education has formulated a course called "Social, Religion, and Culture Studies," which students in each grade study for one to two 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 and generally takes place in a mosque. There are currently 1,612 registered Islamic Religious and Moral Education centers teaching Tadika, with approximately 173 thousand students and more than 4 thousand teachers. For secondary school children, the Ministry of Education allows two separate curricula for private Islamic studies schools. The first type teaches only Islamic religious courses. As of April 2006, there were 92 schools nationwide with 5,684 students and 423 teachers using this curriculum. The government registers but does not certify these schools, and students from these schools cannot continue to any higher education within the country. The number of this type of school was in decline as students opted to attend schools that afford alternatives for higher education. The second curriculum teaches both Islamic religious courses and traditional state education coursework. Approximately 132 schools nationwide with 100,684

students use this curriculum. The Government recognizes these private schools, and graduating students can continue to higher education within the country. A third type of Islamic education available, mostly in the southern part of the country, is traditional pondok schools. During the period covered by this report, there were 372 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 one thousand.

The Government actively sponsors interfaith dialogue in accordance with the constitution, which requires the State to "promote good understanding and harmony among followers of all religions." The Government funds regular meetings and public education programs. These programs included the RAD annual interfaith meeting for representatives and members of all religious groups certified by RAD. The programs also included monthly meetings of the seventeen-member Subcommittee on Religious Relations, located within the prime minister's National Identity Promotion Office (the subcommittee is composed of one representative from the Buddhist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, Hindu, and Sikh communities in addition to civil servants from several government agencies). In March 2006 the RAD organized an interfaith convention in Bangkok, which had 1,600 participants and a major international interfaith event is planned for June 2006 during the sixtieth anniversary celebration of the king's coronation. 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

In the past, government officials, at the request of Chinese Government officials, have reportedly monitored Falun Gong members. During the period covered by this report, the Government denied the application submitted by the local Falun Gong to register as an association with the Office of the National Cultural Commission. The organization was currently challenging this decision through the court system. No action was 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 website that advertises daily gatherings in Bangkok and periodic gatherings in Songkhla.

The Government does not recognize religious faiths 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. During the period covered by this report, there were close to 1,500 registered foreign missionaries in the country, most of them Christian. 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

Violent acts committed by suspected Islamic militants in the 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 period covered by this report, one Buddhist monk and two novices were killed in an attack on a Buddhist temple in Pattani Province. The incident occurred in the early morning hours of October 16, 2005, when approximately twenty assailants attacked a temple in Ponare District, Pattani. The attackers fired guns into temple dwellings, killing two teenage novices, and stabbed a seventy-six year old monk to death, nearly severing his head. The attackers then set fire to several structures and destroyed Buddha images. At the end of the period covered by this report, no one had been arrested or charged in these attacks.

On September 2, 2005, a monk was injured by a bomb in Narathiwat Province. Four others were injured in separate incidents between March and June 2005 in Yala Province. The monks were performing the morning ritual of receiving donations of food and were guarded by armed soldiers. In June 2005, eight civilians were beheaded in six separate incidents. Some observers in the south, including some Muslim leaders, described these incidents as reprisal killings for the arrest and/or killing of suspected Muslim militants by authorities. At the end of the period covered by this report, no one had been arrested for the 2004 murder of three Buddhist monks and the beheading of one civilian Buddhist rubber tapper or for the 2004 attacks on Buddhist temples and one Chinese shrine in the southern provinces of the country. The Government continued to investigate these incidents in the context of security operations involving the 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.

There were almost daily attacks by suspected separatist militants in Thailand's southernmost provinces on both government officials and Buddhists and Muslim civilians. The violence contributed to an atmosphere of fear and suspicion in the southern provinces. However, while the level of tension between local Islamic and Buddhist communities was heightened, it did not result in open communal conflict.

In response to the killings, the Government stationed troops to protect the religious practitioners and structures of all faiths in communities where the potential for violence existed, and provided armed escort for Buddhist monks, where necessary, for their daily rounds to receive alms. The Government offered compensation to the families of 106 Islamic militants slain while attacking security forces on April 28, 2004, and many of the families accepted. The Government allocated $218,000 for the restoration of the Krue Se Mosque, which soldiers damaged during the fighting. During the period covered by this report, the restoration was completed and an additional $40,000 was allocated for supplementary improvements.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious groups closely associated with ethnic minorities, such as Muslims, experienced some societal economic discrimination; however, such discrimination appeared to be linked more to ethnicity than to religion. Continued violence in the far southern regions of the country contributed to negative stereotypes of Muslims held by persons from other geographic areas of the country. Murders clearly targeted at Buddhists increased ethnic tensions between Muslim and Buddhist communities in the far south.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers regularly visit Muslim religious leaders, academics, and elected officials as part of the embassy's goal of understanding the complex ethnic and religious issues at play in society.

During the fiscal year 2005, five Muslims from a broad range of professions participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program, which is the flagship professional exchange program of the Department of State and serves to introduce

young professionals from a wide variety of fields to the United States at an early stage in their professional development.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 288 square miles and its population is approximately 112,400. According to the last official census, in 1996, membership by percentage of population of major denominations was: Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, 41 percent; Roman Catholic, 16 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 14 percent; and Free Church of Tonga, 12 percent. More recently, many faiths have said the figures were no longer accurate. The Mormon Church claimed its members comprised at least 32 percent of the population, while the Baha'is stated they accounted for nearly 5 percent. The Free Wesleyan Church stated its community numbered an estimated 30,000. None of these newer estimates could be independently confirmed. Members of the Tokaikolo (a local offshoot of the Methodist Church), Seventh-day Adventist, Assemblies of God, and Anglican churches were present in much smaller numbers. There were also Muslim and Hindu communities, each comprising negligible numbers. There were no reports of acknowledged atheists.

Western missionaries, particularly Mormons and other Christian denominations and organizations, were active in the country and reported being welcomed and respected in local society.

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 it is not required. All religious groups are permitted duty-free entry of goods intended for religious purposes, but no religious group is subsidized or granted tax-exempt status.

Missionaries operated without special restrictions. There were a number of schools operated by Mormons, the Wesleyan Free Church, and Roman Catholics. The Baha'i Faith, Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God, and the Anglican Church also reported supporting their own schools.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day are official holy days.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The constitution states that Sunday, the Sabbath day, is to be "kept holy" and that no business can be conducted "except according to law." Although an exception is made for hotels and resorts that are part of the tourism industry, the Sabbath day business prohibition is enforced strictly for all businesses, regardless of the business owners' religion.

The Tonga Broadcasting Commission (TBC) maintained policy guidelines regarding the broadcast of religious programming on Radio Tonga. The TBC guidelines stated that in view of "the character of the listening public," those who preach on Radio Tonga must confine their preaching "within the limits of the mainstream Christian tradition." This policy applied to all faiths. Religious leaders from all faiths were permitted to host programs, but the TBC policy did not, for example, permit the Baha'is to discuss the tenets of their religion or mention its founder, Baha'u'llah, by name. Similarly, the TBC did not allow Mormons to discuss their founder, Joseph Smith, or the Book of Mormon by name. Mormons used Radio

Tonga for the announcement of church activities. Other faiths also utilized Radio Tonga. Members of the Baha'i Faith used a privately owned radio station for program activities and the announcement of functions. The TBC insisted its guidelines were nondiscriminatory, but it was considering revising them to avoid the appearance of discrimination.

A government-owned newspaper occasionally carried news articles about Baha'i activities or events, as well as about those of other faiths.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The Tonga National Council of Churches (TNCC) is a nongovernment organization of seven member churches and engages various Christian denominations in ecumenical dialogue. The most active members are the Free Wesleyan, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches. The Mormons do not participate. The TNCC has no formal relationship with the Government, and there were no reports of any government interference with the TNCC's mission.

Religious leaders contacted did not report any overt or latent discriminatory treatment. All religious organizations contacted said religion plays an important part in local society, and there were no reports of religious differences resulting in societal or political hostilities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government does not maintain an embassy in the country; the U.S. ambassador in Suva, Fiji, was accredited to the Government 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 met with religious officials and nongovernmental organizations during visits to the country.

TUVALU

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

National government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, in the case of a charismatic Christian church banned by an island council of elders, the country's chief justice upheld the right of such traditional island councils to restrict the constitutional right to freedom of religion in cases where they contended it could threaten traditional mores and practices. In January 2006 a second traditional island council, on the main island of Funafuti, issued a resolution aimed at the same church that prohibited the establishment or practice of "any new religion." The High Court issued temporary injunctions prohibiting any further action against the church and its missionary work on both islands.

The success of some new Christian churches in winning followers away from the predominant Church of Tuvalu weakened the generally amicable relationship among religions in society. The High Court's decision to uphold the rights of traditional councils to restrict the activities of new faiths presented a challenge to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is composed of nine island groups with an area of approximately ten square miles and an estimated population of 9,500. The Church of Tuvalu, which has historic ties to the Congregational Church and other churches in Samoa, had the largest number of followers. Government estimates of religious affiliation as a percentage of population included: Church of Tuvalu, 91 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 3 percent; Baha'i, 3 percent; Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 percent; and Catholic, 1 percent. There were also smaller numbers of Muslims, Baptists, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and atheists. The Brethren

Church, subject of the high court case on religious freedom, was said to have as many as three hundred adherents, some 3 percent of the population, but this could not be confirmed by independent sources.

All nine island groups had traditional chiefs who were members of the Church of Tuvalu. Most followers of other religions or denominations were found in Funafuti, the capital, with the exception of the relatively large proportion of followers of the Baha'i Faith on Nanumea Island.

There were active Christian missionary organizations in the country representing some of the above-mentioned religious faiths.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There is no state religion, and the constitution provides for separation of church and state. However, in practice government ceremonies at the national and island council levels, such as the opening of Parliament, often include Christian prayers, clergy, and perspectives. By law, any new religious group with more than fifty members must register; failure to register could result in prosecution. The preamble of the constitution states: "And whereas the people of Tuvalu desire to constitute themselves as an independent State based on Christian principles, the Rule of Law, and Tuvaluan custom and tradition."

Missionaries practiced without restriction.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, in 2003 the island council of Nanumanga banned the newly formed Tuvalu Brethren Church. In May 2005 the head of the Tuvalu Brethren Church filed a complaint against the island council, and the case was heard. In October 2005, the country's chief justice, citing the constitution, upheld the right of traditional island councils of elders to restrict the right to freedom of religion in cases where they contend it may threaten traditional mores and practices. The Brethren Church immediately appealed the verdict. In April the Nanumanga council of elders passed another resolution that banned all other new churches and threatened local civil servants with dismissal if they worshipped with the Brethren Church. Despite a High Court injunction against such action, in June the council dismissed without proper notice five council workers who were members of the Brethren Church.

In January 2006 the council of elders on the main island of Funafuti issued a similar resolution prohibiting the establishment or practice of "any new religion." The ban was aimed at the Brethren Church, which was reported to be approximately 300-strong on Funafuti. The ban forbids meetings and worshipping by members of the Brethren Church and specifically prohibits the construction of a new Brethren church. It also extends to all religions not already established on the island. However, the country's high court has issued a temporary injunction prohibiting any further actions against the Brethren Church and its missionary work. The matter was expected to come to trial in late 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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there was a degree of social intolerance for non-Church of Tuvalu activities, particularly on some outer islands.

Members of the Church of Tuvalu dominated most aspects of social and political life in the country, in view of the fact that they comprised approximately 90 percent of the population.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Although the U.S. Government does not maintain a resident embassy in the country, the U.S. ambassador to Fiji is also accredited to the Government. Representatives of the U.S. embassy in Fiji visited the country periodically and discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of the overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officials spoke with the chief justice and expressed their

concern about his October decision upholding the right of traditional authorities to restrict freedom of religion in certain circumstances. Embassy officials also met with representatives of religious communities and nongovernmental organizations that have an interest in religious freedom. The embassy actively supported efforts to improve and expand governmental and societal awareness of and protection for human rights, including the right to freedom of religion.

VANUATU

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

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some churches and individuals objected to the missionary activities of nontraditional denominations and continued to suggest that they be curtailed.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an island nation, covering 4,707 square miles, and its population is approximately 208,900. The great majority belonged to Christian churches, although many combined their Christian faith with cultural practices in place prior to the arrival of Christianity. Church membership primarily was Presbyterian (approximately 32 percent), Roman Catholic (13 percent), Anglican (13 percent), and Seventh-day Adventist (11 percent). Another 14 percent were members of the Church of Christ, the Apostolic Church, the Assemblies of God, and other Christian denominations. The John Frum Movement, a political party that also is an indigenous religious movement, was centered on the island of Tanna and included about 5 percent of the population. The Bahai Faith, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) also were active. There were believed to be members of other religions within the foreign community; they were free to practice their religions, but they were not known to proselytize or hold public religious ceremonies.

Missionaries representing several western churches brought Christianity to the country in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some foreign missionaries continue this work; however, the clergy of the established churches are now primarily indigenous. Missionaries represented the Church of Christ, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist, Anglican, and Roman Catholic churches. The Summer Institute of Linguistics, which translates the New Testament into indigenous languages, also was present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The preamble of the constitution refers to a commitment to traditional values and Christian principles; however, the constitution also provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government did not tolerate the abuse of religious freedom, either by governmental or private actors.

Religious organizations are required to register with the Government; however, this law is not enforced.

The Government interacts with churches through the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Vanuatu Christian Council. Customarily, government oaths of office are taken on the Bible. The Government provides some financial help for the construction of churches for Vanuatu Christian Council members, provides grants to church-operated schools, and pays teachers' salaries at church-operated schools that have been in existence since the country's independence in 1980. These benefits are not available to non-Christian religious organizations. Government schools also schedule time each week for religious education conducted by representatives of council churches, using materials designed by those churches. Students whose parents do not wish them to attend the classes are excused. Non-Christian groups are not permitted to teach their religions in public schools.

Aside from the activities of the Ministry of Home Affairs, use of government resources to support religious activities is not condoned (although there is no law pro-

hibiting 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some churches and individuals objected to the missionary activities of nontraditional denominations 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, subsequent friction generally has been resolved through appeals from traditional leaders to uphold individual rights.

Religious representation at national events is organized through the Vanuatu Christian Council. Ecumenical activities of the council are limited to the interaction of its members.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

VIETNAM

Both the Constitution and law provide for freedom of worship; however, the Government continued to restrict organized activities of religious groups that it declared to be at variance with State laws and policies. The Government attempts to regulate religious practice through a legal framework, which requires that the Government officially sanction the organization and activities of all religious denominations.

Overall respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report as Vietnam continues its transition from a socialist command economy to an open, market-oriented society; however, a number of positive legal reforms adopted in previous years remained in the early stages of implementation. The 2004 Ordinance on Religion and Belief serves as the primary legal framework governing religious practice. The 2005 implementation decree (number 22) for the ordinance delineates established guidelines for religious denominations to register their activities and seek official recognition. The 2005 "Instruction on Protestantism" promulgated by the prime minister directs officials to assist unrecognized Protestant denominations in registering their activities so that they can practice openly. Under the 2004 ordinance, participation in religious activities throughout the country continued to grow, and Protestant believers in the Central Highlands reported significant improvements in their situation. Furthermore, the Government began to promote registration of Protestant house churches in the Northwest Highlands region, but progress was slow and the Government stated that only six previously unregistered northern congregations were allowed to register their activities during the reporting period.

Despite several confirmed reports of police harassment and beatings of unregistered believers belonging to unrecognized religions, Protestants across the north reported improvement in most officials' attitude towards their religion, and in general Protestants were allowed to gather for worship without significant harassment. Restrictions on the hierarchies and clergy of religious groups also remained in place, and the Government maintained a prominent role supervising recognized religions. Religious leaders encountered 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. The Government also actively restricted the leadership of the unrecognized United Buddhist Church of Vietnam and maintained that it will not recognize this organization under its current leadership. The Catholic Church reported that the Government continued to ease restrictions on church assignment of new clergy but indicated that it would like to open additional seminaries in the North.

During the period covered by this report, the Government released four prominent religious prisoners.

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

The U.S. embassy in Hanoi and the U.S. consulate general in Ho Chi Minh City maintain an active and regular dialogue with senior and working-level government officials to advocate greater religious freedom. U.S. officials also meet and communicate 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, raise concerns about the registration and recognition difficulties faced by religious organizations, the detention and arrest of religious figures, the difficulties Protestants face in the Central and Northwest Highlands, and other restrictions on religious freedom with the prime minister, deputy prime minister, government cabinet ministers, Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) leaders, provincial officials, and others.

In September 2004, then Secretary of State Colin Powell designated Vietnam a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In November 2005 Secretary of State Rice renewed Vietnam's CPC status but noted significant positive changes in religious freedom during the year. Changes included a May 2005 exchange of letters with the United States in which the Government set forth a number of commitments to advance and protect religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 127,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 83.5 million. The Government officially recognizes one Buddhist organization (Buddhists made up approximately 50 percent of the population), the Roman Catholic Church (8 to 10 percent of the population), several Cao Dai organizations (1.5 to 3 percent of the population), one Hoa Hao organization (1.5 to 4 percent of the population), two Protestant organizations (.5 to 2 percent of the population), and one Muslim organization (less than 0.1 percent of the population). Other believers belonged to organizations that are not officially recognized by the Government. Most other Vietnamese citizens considered themselves non-religious, although many practiced traditional beliefs such as veneration of ancestors and national heroes.

Buddhism is the dominant religious belief. Many Buddhists practiced an amalgam of Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucian traditions that sometimes is called the country's "triple religion." Some estimates suggested that more than half of the population was at least nominally Buddhist. The Committee for Religious Affairs used a much lower estimate of 12 percent (10 million) practicing Buddhists Mahayana Buddhists, most of whom were part of the ethnic Kinh majority and found throughout the country, especially in the populous areas of the northern and southern delta regions. There were proportionately fewer Buddhists in certain highland areas, although migration of Kinh to these areas was changing this distribution. A Khmer ethnic minority in the south practices Theravada Buddhism. Numbering just over 1 million persons, they lived almost exclusively in the Mekong Delta.

There were an estimated 6 to 8 million Roman Catholics in the country, although official government statistics put the number at 5,570,000. Catholics lived throughout the country, but the largest concentrations remained in the southern provinces around Ho Chi Minh City, in parts of the Central Highlands and in the provinces southeast of Hanoi. Catholicism has revived in many areas, with newly rebuilt or renovated churches in recent years and growing numbers of persons who want to be religious workers.

The Cao Dai religion was founded in 1926 in the southern part of the country. Official government statistics put the number of Cao Dai at 2.4 million, although Cao Dai officials routinely claimed as many as four million adherents. Cao Dai groups are most active in Tay Ninh Province, where the Cao Dai "Holy See" is located, and in Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta. There were thirteen sepa-

rate groups within the Cao Dai religion; the largest was the Tay Ninh sect, which represented more than half of all Cao Dai believers. The Cao Dai religion is syncretistic, combining elements of many faiths. A small Cao Dai organization, the Thien Tien branch, was formally recognized in 1995. The Tay Ninh Cao Dai branch was granted legal recognition in 1997.

The Hoa Hao branch of Buddhism was founded in the southern part of the country in 1939. According to the Government, there were 1.6 million Hoa Hao followers; affiliated expatriate groups estimated that there may be up to three million followers. Hoa Hao followers were 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 was organized in 1999. Some Hoa Hao followed other sects that do not have official recognition.

Estimates of the number of Protestants in the country ranged from the official government figure of 500,000 to claims by churches of 1,600,000 or more. The two officially recognized Protestant churches are the Southern Evangelical Church of Vietnam (SECV), recognized in 2001, and the smaller Evangelical Church of Vietnam North (ECVN), recognized since 1963. The SECV had affiliated churches in all of the southern provinces of the country. There were estimates that the growth of Protestant believers has been as much as 600 percent over the past decade, despite government restrictions on proselytizing activities. Some of these new converts belonged to unregistered evangelical house churches. Based on believers' estimates, two-thirds of Protestants were 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, Bahnar, and Koho, among others).

Mosques serving the country's small Muslim population, estimated at between 50,000 to 80,000 persons, operated in western An Giang Province, Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and provinces in the southern coastal part of the country. The Muslim community was composed mainly of ethnic Cham, although in Ho Chi Minh City and An Giang Province it included some ethnic Vietnamese and migrants originally from Malaysia, Indonesia, and India. Approximately half of the Muslims in the country were Sunnis. Sunni Muslims are concentrated in five locations around the country. An estimated 15,000 live in Tan Chau district of western An Giang Province, which borders Cambodia. Nearly 3,000 live in western Tay Ninh Province, which also borders Cambodia. More than 5,000 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 central coast of the country. Both groups appear to be on cordial terms with the Government and are able to practice their faith freely. They have limited contact with Muslims in foreign countries.

There were several smaller religious communities not recognized by the Government, the largest of which is the Hindu community. Approximately 50,000 ethnic Cham in the south-central coastal area practiced a devotional form of Hinduism. Another 4,000 Hindus lived in Ho Chi Minh City; some were ethnic Cham but most were Indian or of mixed Indian-Vietnamese descent.

There were an estimated 6,000 members of the Baha'i Faith, largely concentrated in the south. Prior to 1975, there were an estimated 200,000 believers, according to Baha'i officials. Open Baha'i practice was banned from 1975 to 1992, and the number of believers dropped sharply during this time. Since 1992, the Baha'i have met in unofficial meeting halls. Community leaders said they had good relations with authorities and appeared to be able to practice their faith without significant harassment. At the end of the reporting period, the Baha'i were preparing to apply for registration and recognition under the new legal framework.

There are several hundred members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) who were spread throughout the country but lived primarily in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The Mormon Church HCMC was also preparing to apply for registration under the new legal framework on religion at the end of the reporting period.

At least ten active but unofficially unrecognized congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses were present in the country, each with several hundred members. Most of the congregations were in the south, with five in Ho Chi Minh City. Congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City also applied for registration under the new legal framework during the reporting period.

Fourteen million citizens comprising seventeen percent or more of the population reportedly did not practice any organized religion. Some sources strictly define citizens who are considered to be practicing Buddhists, excluding those whose activities

are limited to visiting pagodas on ceremonial holidays. Using this definition, the number of nonreligious persons would be much higher, perhaps reaching as many as fifty 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 from the early 1990s.

Ethnic minorities constituted approximately 14 percent of the overall population. Ethnic minorities historically have practiced different traditional beliefs than those of the ethnic majority Kinh. Many ethnic minorities, particularly the H'mong, Dzao and Jarai groups, have converted to Catholicism or Protestantism.

Foreign missionaries legally are not permitted to proselytize or perform religious activities. Undeclared missionaries from several countries were active in the country.

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 restrict significantly 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 came into effect on November 15, 2004. The Ordinance serves as the primary document governing religious practice. It reiterates citizens' rights to freedom of belief, religion, and freedom not to follow a religion, and it states that violations of these freedoms are prohibited. However, it advises that "abuse" of freedom of belief or religion "to undermine the country's peace, independence, and unity" is illegal and warns that religious activities must be suspended if they negatively affect the cultural traditions of the nation. The ordinance continues the practice of government control and oversight of religious organizations. 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 liberalizes government oversight of religion to some extent. For example, religious organizations are only required to inform appropriate authorities of their annual activities or the 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 healthcare and education, which was limited in the past.

In February 2005 the prime minister issued the "Instruction on Some Tasks Regarding Protestantism." The instruction calls upon authorities to facilitate the requests of recognized Protestant denominations to construct churches and train and appoint pastors. Further, the instruction directs authorities to help unrecognized denominations register their congregations so that they can worship openly and move towards fulfilling the criteria required for full recognition. Addressing the Central and Northwest Highlands, the instruction directs authorities to help groups of Protestant believers register their religious activities and practice in homes or "suitable locations," even if they do not meet the criteria to establish an official congregation. The instruction 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. As in the ordinance, the decree explicitly bans forced renunciations of faith. It also delineates specific procedures by which an unrecognized religious organization can register its places of worship, its clerics, and its activities and thus operate openly. It further provides procedures for these groups to apply for official recognition from the Government to gain additional rights. The decree specifies that a religious organization must have twenty 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, even prior to registration, can be counted toward the twenty-year 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.

The national-level Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA) is charged with disseminating information about the new legal framework to provincial-, district-, commune-, and village-level authorities and assuring its uniform compliance. Implementation of the new legal framework at lowermost levels of the Government continued to be mixed. However, during the reporting period, national- and provincial-level 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. Authorities in other areas, particularly in the Northwest Highlands provinces, were less proactive in enforcing the legal changes mandated by the Central Government, although conditions for Protestants in the region generally improved during the reporting period.

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 sometimes underwent significant harassment. This was true particularly for Protestants in the Northwest Highlands and in certain rural communities in southern and central regions, including parts of the Central Highlands. During the reporting period, local and provincial authorities in the Northwest Highlands were engaged in discussions with religious leaders and with the central government about registering house churches or recognizing new official congregations; however, only six new Protestant congregations were registered according to the Government, and no new religions were recognized during this reporting cycle.

National security and national solidarity provisions in the constitution override many laws providing for religious freedom, and these provisions reportedly have been used to impede religious gatherings and the spread of religion to certain ethnic groups. The penal code, as amended in 1997, established penalties for offenses that are defined only vaguely, including "attempting to undermine national unity" by promoting "division between religious believers and nonbelievers." In some cases authorities used Article 258 of the penal code to charge persons with practicing religion illegally. This article allowed for jail terms of up to three 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." Examples of such cases were found among the H'mong Protestants in the Northwest Highlands, ethnic minority Protestants in the Central Highlands (sometimes referred to as Montagnard Protestants), and Hoa Hao adherents. In the case of the Central Highlands, officials continued to be concerned that groups inside and outside the country were encouraging the spread of a form of Protestantism that promotes ethnic minority exclusivism and separatism.

Decree 31, a 1997 directive on administrative probation, gives national and local security officials broad powers to detain and monitor citizens and control where they live and work for up to two years if they are believed to be threatening "national security." The authorities in some instances have used administrative probation to impose significant restrictions on the freedom of movement as a means of controlling persons whom they believe hold independent and potentially subversive opinions. In October 2003 at least four United Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) leaders apparently were placed under administrative probation for two-year terms. During the current reporting period, their movement was restricted. For example, in 2006 UBCV General Secretary Thich Quang Do was prevented from traveling from Ho Chi Minh City to Binh Dinh province to visit the ailing UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang.

The Government does not favor a particular religion, and virtually all senior government and CPV officials, as well as the vast majority of national assembly delegates, are formally "without religion." However, many 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 wish not to practice a religion.

The Government requires all religious groups to register. It uses this process to monitor and sometimes attempt to control religious organizations, as it does with all social organizations.

The Government officially recognizes Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Muslim religious organizations. Individual congregations within each of these religious groups must be registered as well. Some leaders of alternative Buddhist, Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai organizations and believers of these religions do not participate in the government-approved associations.

Implementing Decree 22 clarifies the procedures through which religious organizations and individual religious congregations can seek official recognition. The de-

cree further specifies that the appropriate authorities provide a written response to such request within HCMC: Thirty, forty-five, sixty, or ninety days, depending on the scope of the request. In the case of a refusal, a specific reason must be included in the written response. However, there is no specific mechanism for appeal given in the ordinance, nor are the reasons for denying a request delimited in any way.

Early in the reporting period, some unrecognized Protestant denominations sought registration under the new legal system governing religion. According to Decree 22, however, a one-year period was required after November 15, 2004 (the effective date of the ordinance) before any new denomination that otherwise fulfills the appropriate criteria could be recognized and these applications were delayed. To obtain official recognition, a denomination must receive government approval of its leadership, its structure, and the overall scope of its activities. Recognized religious denominations, in principle, are allowed to open, operate, and refurbish places of worship, train religious leaders, and obtain permission for the publication of materials.

Registration requires a congregation to file with relevant provincial authorities information about its structure, leadership, and activities. Authorities then have forty-five days to raise questions or concerns. National-level registrations have a sixty-day consideration period. The CRA must issue a license before an organization is considered registered. The Seventh-day Adventists, Grace Baptist Church, and Mennonite Church of Pastor Nguyen Trung have registered in Ho Chi Minh City under these legal provisions. Additional registrations for the United World Mission Church, the Mormon Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Vietnam Pentecostal Church, and the Presbyterian Relief Organization were pending. More than 500 ECVN congregations out of a reported total of 1,072 unrecognized congregations in the Northwest Highlands applied to register during the reporting period, but only six were granted permission to do so by the end of the reporting period, according to the Government. These six were part of a CRA pilot project to begin registrations in the border provinces of Lai Chau, Lao Cai and Ha Giang. The CRA claimed limited resources forced them to focus on only these three provinces in the initial round of registrations.

Except in limited parts of the Central Highlands and the Northwest Highlands, officially recognized religious organizations were able to operate openly, and followers of these religions were able to worship without harassment. Officially registered and recognized organizations must register their annual activities and the transfer and promotion of clerics with authorities. Holding religious conferences or congresses, opening seminaries, enrolling classes in seminaries, collecting donations from believers, constructing or renovating religious facilities, and participating in religious training courses abroad require the explicit approval of authorities. The naming of new clerics and the promotion of religious dignitaries, such as bishops, require registration with authorities. However when a "foreign element" like the Vatican is involved, official approval is required in advance.

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. For example, in certain cases recognized and unrecognized Protestant groups have been able to overcome local harassment or overturn negative local decisions when they have appealed to higher-level authorities. In other cases, this informal appeals process has proven ineffective. In some cases local officials reportedly have told church leaders that national-level laws do not apply to their jurisdictions. There were no reports of punishment of government officials who do not follow laws protecting religious practice, although a resolution on the victims of miscarriages of justice, issued by the National Assembly in 2003, provides channels for citizens to seek official compensation for some abuses.

There are no religious national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government practices placed restrictions on religious freedom, although in many areas Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and the Government itself reported an increase in religious activity and observance. Officially recognized religious groups faced limitations in obtaining teaching materials, expanding training facilities, publishing religious materials, and expanding the number of clergy in religious training in response to increased demand from congregations. However, the Government continued to ease limitations compared to previous years.

The Government continued to ban and actively discourage participation in certain unrecognized religious groups, including the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV) and some Protestant, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai groups. Organizational activities by many of these groups are illegal although enforcement of this ban varied widely.

The Government requires all Buddhist monks to be approved by and work under the officially recognized Buddhist organization, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS). The Government influenced the selection of the leadership of the VBS, excluding some leaders of the pre-1981 UBCV organization. The number of Buddhist seminarians is controlled and limited by the Office of Religious Affairs, although the number of Buddhist academies at the local and provincial levels has increased in recent years in addition to several university-equivalent academies.

The Government continued to oppose efforts by the unrecognized UBCV to operate independently. In 2003 senior monks of the UBCV held an organizational meeting without government permission at a monastery in Binh Dinh Province. Subsequent to the meeting, four leading monks of the church were detained and sentenced without trial to two years' "administrative detention" in their respective pagodas. Authorities have not provided them with a written decision of their administrative detention, despite the legal requirement to do so. Many other leading UBCV members have been placed under conditions similar to administrative probation and, in some cases, effectively under "house arrest," despite the lack of any charges against them. Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang and deputy leader Thich Quang Do have been placed under similar restrictions, although the Government did not appear to be investigating its allegations of "possession of state secrets" against them. Since October 2003 Thich Quang Do has repeatedly attempted to travel to Quy Nhon Province to visit Thich Huyen Quang. Using various pretexts, government authorities physically prevented Thich Quang Do from doing so and returned him to his pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City under police escort. However, Thich Quang Do and Thich Huyen Quang were able to receive visits from foreign diplomats. Thich Quang Do was able to see other UBCV members on occasion during the period covered by this report. Thich Quang Do and some other UBCV leaders also have been able to maintain contact with associates overseas.

The Government technically maintains veto power over Vatican appointments of bishops; however, in practice it has cooperated with the Catholic Church in nominations for appointment. The Church operates six seminaries in the country with more than 800 students enrolled, as well as a new special training program for "older" students. All students must be approved by local authorities for enrolling in seminary and again prior to their ordination as priests. The Church believed that the number of students being ordained was insufficient to support the growing Catholic population and has indicated it would like to open additional seminaries and enroll new classes more frequently. The Church has had an application pending for five years to open a new seminary in Dong Nai Province, but approval remained pending.

The practice of Protestantism remained a sensitive issue in the Central Highlands provinces. The Government is concerned that some ethnic minority groups operating in this region have been operating a self-styled "Dega Church," which reportedly mixes religious practice with political activism and calls for ethnic minority separatism.

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. In 2001 the Government ordered all Protestant congregations affiliated with the SECV—numbering at least one thousand—to close. Most of these have been allowed to reopen and operate. However, at least one third of SECV congregations closed in 2001 in the province of Dak Lak were unable to operate and worshipers ordered to pray at home in private. A number of unrecognized 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, although some incidents of local police harassment continued to occur.

The Government continued its close oversight and with varying degrees of success, exerted control over religious hierarchies, organized religious activities, and other activities of religious groups through Committees for Religious Affairs at the national and provincial levels. While the committees are tasked with protecting the rights of recognized religious bodies, in practice there are few effective legal remedies for violations of religious freedom committed by government officials.

There are more than 120,000 Protestants in the northern part of the country and the Northwest Highlands region. The prime minister's Instruction on Protestantism noted the existence of believers in the Northwest Highlands and instructed officials to guide them in finding "suitable places" to practice their religion. More than 500 ECVN congregations applied to register during the reporting period; however, most applications were either rejected outright, ignored or returned unopened. The Government asserts that six pilot registrations were allowed in June and July in Lai

Chau, Lao Cai, and Ha Giang Provinces, but this could not be independently confirmed.

The Hoa Hao have faced some restrictions on their religious and political activities since 1975, in part because of their previous armed opposition to the communist forces 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 pressure. Two members of the HHCBC, Tran Van Thang and Tran Van Hoang, were arrested on February 25, 2005, and sentenced to six and nine months' imprisonment respectively for unauthorized distribution of audio cassettes and DVDs containing teachings of HHCBC leaders. A June 2005 commemoration of Foundation Day led to clashes between police and activists who were protesting Government control of the Hoa Hao faith. Some Hoa Hao activists continued to encourage self-immolation of their followers to protest government repression. In September 2005 two Hoa Hao activists self-immolated when police attempted to arrest them for their involvement in the June clashes, resulting in the death of one activist. Seven activists were arrested, tried, and given prison terms ranging from four to seven years. In August 2005 a Hoa Hao activist attempted to self-immolate in front of the U.S. consulate general in Ho Chi Minh City but was stopped by consulate guards and local police. Frictions between some Hoa Hao activists and government officials in the Mekong Delta continued to flare throughout the reporting period.

There are six different officially recognized branches of the Cao Dai Church in the southern part of the country, as well as several others that remain unrecognized. These sects generally divide along geographic lines. The largest Cao Dai sect is based in Tay Ninh Province, where the religion was founded in 1926 and where the seat of Cao Dai authority is located. The Executive Council of the Tay Ninh Province Cao Dai received official government recognition in 1997. Independent Cao Dai groups allege that government interference has undermined the independence of the Tay Ninh group, and it no longer faithfully upholds Cao Dai principles and traditions. Religious training takes place at individual Cao Dai temples rather than at centralized schools; Cao Dai officials have indicated that they do not wish to open a seminary.

There are no formal prohibitions on changing one's religion. Many converts may find the procedures overly cumbersome or fear government retribution. Formal conversions appear to be relatively rare, apart from non-Catholics marrying Catholics. There have been some reports that some local officials in rural communities continue to discourage conversion to Protestantism by threatening converts that they will lose education and social welfare allowances.

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.

The HCMC-based New Life Fellowship Church (NLF), which catered to both foreigners and citizens and is headed by a foreign missionary, was prevented from gathering in HCMC hotels in August 2005 after it launched a separate service for local citizens in contravention to the law. Since then, foreigners in the NLF have been able to gather in small groups at home. In April 2006 the NLF was able to hold its first large prayer meeting for foreigners on the grounds of a HCMC hotel for foreigners since August 2005. The NLF remained in discussion with city- and national-level officials to find a permanent, legal solution to its status.

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 in theory are permitted to speak about their beliefs and attempt to persuade others to adopt their religions, at least in recognized places of worship, but are discouraged from doing so elsewhere. For example, Baptists in Bac Giang Province near Hanoi were prevented from proselytizing within their community by local officials during the reporting period, despite the apparent legality of their organization, because the religion was introduced to the province by pastors from the south.

The Government requires all religious publishing to be done by the Religious Publishing House, which is a part of the Office of Religious Affairs, or by other government-approved publishing houses after the Government first approves the proposed items. A range of Buddhist sacred scriptures, Bibles, and other religious texts and publications are printed by these organizations and are distributed openly. The Religious Publishing House has printed 250,000 copies of parts of the Hoa Hao sacred scriptures, along with 100,000 volumes featuring the founder's teachings and prophesies; however, Hoa Hao believers reported that the Government continued to restrict the distribution of the full scriptures, specifically the poetry of the founder. The official Hoa Hao Representative Committee cited a lack of funds, not government restrictions, as the reason why the Hoa Hao scriptures had not been published in full. The Muslim Association reportedly was able to print enough copies of the Qur'an in 2000 to distribute one to each Muslim believer in the country. The Christian Bible is printed in Vietnamese, Chinese, and English, but not in ethnic minority languages. Some Protestant house church groups have had Bibles or other religious materials that were printed abroad seized by authorities on the grounds that any "foreign language" material that has not been explicitly authorized by the Government is illegal. CRA officials could not confirm if any ethnic minority texts published abroad have been so authorized. Seizures of ethnic language bibles are particularly acute among ethnic minority church groups in some Northwest Highlands provinces.

The Government allows travel for religious purposes, but the approval of authorities is required for participation in religious conferences and training courses abroad. Muslims are able to undertake the Hajj, and Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant officials have generally been able to travel abroad for study and for conferences. Some Protestant house church leaders have alleged that they are unable to obtain passports for international travel. For example, one Protestant house church leader had his passport seized by government authorities in 2004. However, 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 is particularly 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 3.1 million Communist Party members are religious believers. A 2003 CPV Central Committee resolution on religion called for recruiting and advancing more religious believers into the CPV's ranks. Clergy and believers of various faiths serve in local and provincial government positions and are represented on the National Assembly. CPV and Government officials routinely visit pagodas, temples, and churches, making a special point to visit Protestant churches in the Central Highlands over Christmas.

The Implementing Decree for the Ordinance on Religion and Belief stipulates that local religious affairs committees must approve the construction of new religious facilities. The renovation of religious facilities requires notification of authorities, a relaxation on previous regulations.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools; however, it permits clergy to teach at universities in subjects in which they are qualified. Buddhist monks have lectured at the Ho Chi Minh Political Academy, the main CPV school. Several Catholic nuns and at least one Catholic priest teach at Ho Chi Minh City universities. They are not allowed to wear religious dress when they teach or to identify themselves as clergy. Catholic, 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.

Religious organizations have no legal claim to lands or properties taken over by the state following the end of the 1954 war against French rule and following the reunification of the country in 1975. Despite this blanket prohibition, authorities, mostly at the provincial level, have returned a limited number of confiscated church properties and remain in discussion on other properties. One of the vice-chairmen of the Government-recognized VBS has stated that approximately 30 percent of Buddhist properties confiscated in Ho Chi Minh City have been returned, and from 5 to 10 percent of all Buddhist properties confiscated in the south have been returned. The Catholic and recognized Protestant organizations have obtained a small number of previously confiscated properties but had ongoing disputes with officials over others. Some properties have been returned to the Hoa Hao Administrative Council, but few Cao Dai properties have been returned, according to church leaders. Many of the properties seized in the past were religious schools and hospitals that were incorporated into the state system.

Although the new Ordinance on Religion and Belief encourages religious organizations to conduct charitable activities in education and healthcare, the degree of government oversight of these activities varied greatly among localities. In some areas, especially in the south, Catholic priests and nuns operated kindergartens, orphanages, vocational training centers, and clinics and engaged in a variety of other humanitarian projects. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, the Catholic Church 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 were in discussion about how to officially sanction new initiatives, such as a walk-in clinic for possible HIV/AIDS victims, although it allowed the Church to pursue these initiatives quietly. Charitable activities by the Catholic Church were much more restricted in northern Vietnam.

The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha engaged in humanitarian activities, including antidrug programs, in many parts of the country. The officially recognized Hoa Hao organization reported that it engaged in numerous charitable activities and local development projects.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Reports of abuses of religious freedom diminished during the period covered by this report; however, some religious believers continued to experience harassment or repression because they operated without legal sanction. 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. In one instance, in June 2006 in Thanh Hoa Province two Protestants were beaten by local police. However, the number of credible reports of such incidents was lower compared with previous years and largely seemed to reflect individual bias at the local level rather than official policy in most cases. 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 some persons based, at least in part, on their religious beliefs and practice, particularly in mountainous ethnic minority areas.

The international nongovernmental organization Human Rights Watch reported that security forces in Kontum Province demolished the chapel of Mennonite Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh in January and September 2004. Pastor Chinh is affiliated with the Mennonite church of Pastor Quang. Authorities reportedly based their actions on the fact that Chinh had purchased under a false name the land on which the chapel was built. Some observers noted that another unregistered Protestant church operated a short distance away from Chinh's but suffered no harassment. Chinh has reportedly complained that he has been refused issuance of an identity card, which is required for household registration and ownership of property.

Pastor and house church leader Nguyen Hong Quang imprisoned in 2004 and sentenced to a three-year prison term, was released in September 2005 in an amnesty. Five of his followers were sentenced to between nine months and two years in prison. Quang and his followers were convicted as a result of an incident in March 2004 in which he and several of his followers confronted and scuffled with two individuals believed to be plain clothed police officers monitoring his residence; however, some observers connected Quang's arrest to his broader social activism. Ho Chi Minh City police regularly targeted Pastor Quang's Mennonite house church for harassment when the church was led by his wife Le Thi Phu Dzung during the period of Pastor Quang's imprisonment. Police called Mrs. Dzung in for questioning on several occasions, disrupted church services, and detained groups of followers for short periods. In May 2006, Pastor Quang and some followers were detained for nearly twenty-four 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 some evidence.

Baptist pastor Than Van Truong was released in September 2005 after spending one 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.

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. There were unconfirmed reports that a Methodist church in Xuan Lanh Commune, Dong Xuan District, Phu Yen Province, and a Nazarene Church in Phu Ly Commune, Vinh Cuu District, Dong Nai Province, were harassed by local authorities for holding "illegal gatherings." 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 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 Kien Giang in January 2006, police banned the gathering of a house church affiliated with the Methodist community and confiscated the identification of a visiting pastor.

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.

During the reporting period there were fewer reports of leaders of nonregistered churches in the Northwest Highlands being harassed or detained and pressured to renounce their faith.

House churches are frequently tolerated in some places, although their unofficial status often leaves them at the whim of local authorities. For example, in February 2005, government border guards in Gap Trung village, Hoang Su Phi District, Ha Giang Province, reportedly intimidated local Protestants and blocked them from gathering to hold services in an unofficial house church. At least four house churches in Muong Nha Commune and Pu Nhi Commune of Dien Bien Province were reportedly unable to meet and hold religious services.

The dissemination of laws regarding the Ordinance on Religion and Belief, the Implementing Decree for the Ordinance on Religion and Belief, and the prime minister's Instruction on Protestantism have remained a slow process, and through the

end of the period covered by this report, many leaders of places of worship reported that police and other authorities had not implemented fully these legal codes. However, central- and provincial-level authorities have conducted at least some training sessions to educate local officials on the legal framework. Implementation of the new legal framework has been particularly slow in the Northern and Northwest Highlands provinces, particularly with regard to Protestants, and local officials often used legal pretexts to harass church members and leaders. This harassment diminished somewhat over the course of the reporting period, particularly after January 2006.

Protestants in Bao Thang District of Lao Cai Province have not been allowed to celebrate Christmas since 1990. In 2005 they were required to seek permission from local authorities for their Christmas celebrations, but just before the holiday, local authorities ordered the congregation to take down all decorations. Around the same time, two deacons in Bat Xat District of Lao Cai who traveled to Hanoi were given significant fines as were two deacons from Phung Phong Hai Town in the same district who acquired application forms from the ECVN. The two were arrested on their return from Hanoi and held for sixteen days.

Credible reports indicated that officials in Bac Ha District of Lao Cai Province refused to forward the local congregation's registration application to higher officials. The officials have also encouraged non-Protestant relatives to harass believers until they give up their religion. In one case, police refused to intervene when the brother of a Protestant woman repeatedly beat her husband, hinting that, "since you are Protestant, it is okay for him to beat your husband until he and you renounce your faith." A house church deacon in Muon Nghe District in Dien Bien was arrested in November 2005 after he returned to the district from Hanoi carrying ECVN documents. Officials of the Border Protection Force (BPF) justified his arrest by saying that "he was not allowed to travel that far to get documents from the ECVN" even if he asked permission first. Since this event, a special task force of BPF personnel has been living in Protestant villages to watch villager activities and to confiscate all H'mong language bibles they find. In August 2005, district-level government in the province of Phu Yen turned down the registration application of a Baptist congregation, claiming that the house church is "Vietnamese-American" and did not meet legal requirements. It was unclear whether the decision was appealed.

In January 2006 in Xin Man District of Ha Giang, district-level authorities told an unregistered congregation that, "if five or more of your members gather together, we will prosecute you." The group submitted an application to register but has not received any official response to their request. 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 VND $6 (VND 100,000) each for "being Protestant" and for signing documents requesting registration for their group.

There were reports from parts of the Northwest Highlands that local officials told believers the new laws did not apply to the Northwest. Although reportedly 535 house churches in the Northwest Highlands applied to register, only 6 were allowed to do so by the end of the reporting period according to the Government.

Despite significant improvements in the Central Highlands, at least one third of SECV congregations in Dak Lak faced significant 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. There were some anecdotal reports that in some areas local police officials were rebuked for harassing house churches in contravention of the prime minister's Instruction on Protestantism. In a few incidents in the Mekong Delta and in central regions, local authorities reportedly increased harassment of groups that submitted applications to register.

The repression 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 reportedly 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. We cannot estimate the extent of support in the Central Highlands for the Dega Church, but it remained an issue of significant concern for central and provincial governments.

On April 10, 2004, several thousand ethnic minority citizens protested against authorities in several districts in the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, and Dak Nong. Authorities suppressed the protests, including beating or killing some of the protestors. A number of the protestors reportedly resorted to violence as well. Individuals supporting the Dega movement from abroad claimed that restrictions on religious freedom were a significant factor in the protests. The Government, as well as many official and unofficial religious leaders, depicted the protests as being motivated by disputes over land or other socio-economic grievances. Since April 2004 there have been no new large-scale protests in the Central Highlands and the Government has taken some additional steps in an attempt to improve socioeconomic and religious freedom conditions for the ethnic minority community.

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.

In August 2005 Vo Van Thanh Liem, Nguyen Phi Long, Nguyen Van Dien, Mai Thi Dung, Vo Van Buu, Tran Thanh Phong, Nguyen Thi Ha, Mai Van Thung and To Van Man were arrested in coordinated raids across the Mekong Delta. Vo Van Buu attempted self-immolation but survived. His colleague Tan Van Ut committed self-immolation and died during the police raid. Police accused the ten individuals of playing key roles in a June 2005 protest and clash with police following a religious event organized by the HHCBC. In trials in the Mekong Delta, seven of the nine received sentences ranging from four to seven years. It appeared that Nguyen Phi Long and Mai Van Thung were not tried or convicted.

Ma Van Bay, a Protestant church leader, was sentenced to six years imprisonment in April 2004. He was charged with theft after collecting voluntary donations for church use.

In February 2005 police in An Giang Province detained Hoa Hao believers Tran Van Hoang and Tran Van Thanh for distributing unauthorized audio cassettes and DVDs with religious teachings on them. On April 27, authorities sentenced them to nine and six months' imprisonment, respectively. While the two were convicted of illegal distribution of recordings, the extreme rarity with which this regulation is enforced in Vietnam led observers to believe they were targeted as a result of their adherence to the unrecognized HHCBC. The two individuals reportedly were released at the expiry of their prison terms.

In August 2004 authorities arrested Hong Thien Hanh, leader of the small To Dinh Tan Chieu Minh Cao Dai sect in Tien Giang Province. The Government claimed that Hanh had engaged in illegal religious activities, printed and distributed religious information without permission, and defrauded believers. Some independent Cao Dai confirmed the Government's allegations against Hanh.

At least fifteen individuals, including UBCV monks Thich Huyen Quang, Thich Quang Do and Catholic priest Pham Van Loi, were held in conditions resembling house arrest for reasons related to the expression of their religious beliefs or attempts to form nonauthorized religious organizations, despite the apparent lack of any official charges against them. A number of other UBCV, Cao Dai, Catholic, Hoa Hao, and Protestant dignitaries and believers had their movements restricted or were watched and followed by police.

Forced Religious Conversion

The Implementing Decree of the Ordinance on Religion and Belief, states that, "Acts to force citizens to follow a religion or renounce their faith...are not allowed." The Prime Minister's Instruction on Some Tasks Regarding Protestantism contains a similarly worded statement. While government officials said that forced conversions or renunciation of faith had always been illegal, these were the first legal documents to state so explicitly. Religious contacts from the Central and Northwest Highlands reported that attempted forced renunciations continued to decrease. Nonetheless, several incidents were reported during the period covered by this report.

According to a number of credible sources, on several occasions, local officials in several northwestern villages attempted to convince or force H'mong Protestants to recant their faith. Local authorities also encouraged clan elders to pressure members of their extended families to cease practicing Christianity and to return to traditional practices. For example, in July and August 2004, authorities reportedly de-

tained without charge more than 100 H'mong Protestants—choosing 1 member from each Protestant family—in at least 5 different communes in Sapa District, Lao Cai Province. The authorities attempted to force the detainees to renounce Protestantism, releasing them only when they promised to do so. During the reporting period there were no credible reports of such attempted forced renunciations in the Sapa area, although some believers claimed that local authorities attempted to revoke land title from Protestants who refused to renounce their faith. Four H'mong Protestants from Gap Trung Village, Hoang Su Phi District, Ha Giang Province, were reportedly pressured unsuccessfully by Government border guards to sign documents renouncing their faith in April 2005. Similarly, in May 2006, authorities in Cha Cang Commune, Muong Lay District, Dien Bien Province, reportedly pressured believers from several Protestant house churches to construct traditional altars in their homes, and to sign documents renouncing Protestantism.

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 during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to ease limitations on restrictions placed upon Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hoa Hoa, and Cao Dai compared to previous years. Much of the change came from implementation of significant revisions to the legal framework governing religion instituted in 2004 and 2005 and a lessening of government pressure on Protestant groups. At the end of this reporting period, the legal reforms remained in the early stages of implementation. Nevertheless, many recognized and unrecognized religious groups, especially Protestant groups in the Central and Northwest Highlands regions, reported that they believed the situation for their practitioners continued to improve overall.

The Prime Minister's Instruction on Protestantism also instructed officials in the Central Highlands to continue to recognize new chapters of the SECV. During the period covered by this report, the SECV and house churches generally reported improved conditions in the Central Highlands provinces of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, Kon Tum, and Dak Nong. At least fifteen new Protestant SECV congregations in the Central Highlands have been 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 75,000 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 some house church 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. During the reporting period, Gia Lai Province also permitted the SECV to open a Bible training school for unrecognized preachers, which could potentially lead to an even more rapid expansion of the number of new pastors in that province and hence open the way for further registrations. 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.

Unlike in previous years, officials in most of the northern provinces acknowledged the presence of Protestants, and said that, in keeping with the Government's instructions, they planned to expedite registration of some congregations. ECVN contacts in the Northwest confirmed that most unregistered congregations were generally allowed to worship in their homes and to meet openly and during the daytime, with the full knowledge of authorities. In general, provincial authorities suggested that Protestants would be allowed to organize and gather in small groups for the time being without receiving legal registration. For example, in Quang Ninh Province, officials tolerated the activities of local Protestants so long as they did not gather in large groups and indicated that if the local congregation "continues to behave" for one year's time, the provincial authorities would grant them permission to register.

Police and other government officials in the Northwest Highlands worked with house church leaders in some areas to inform them of the new regulations and six previously unregistered ECVN house churches—two in Lai Chau Province and four in Lao Cai province—were officially registered according to the CRA. 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." More than 300 local officials attended these training classes in Hanoi and Hue. 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, and Assemblies of God do not wish to join the SECV or ECVN because of doctrinal differences. In many parts of Vietnam, particularly in urban areas, these and other unrecognized Protestant organizations reported that they were able to practice openly and with the knowledge of local officials. While there were notable exceptions, such as with the Ho Chi Minh City Mennonite church led by Pastor Le Hong Quang, as a rule 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 registration and recognition with leaders of at least four Protestant denominations and the Jehovah's Witnesses. At the end of the reporting period, one subgroup each of the Mennonite church, the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Grace Baptist Church had been registered in Ho Chi Minh City. National registration for these groups, as well as the United World Mission Church based in Danang, has been pending since September 2005.

Attendance at religious services continued to increase during the period covered by this report. The number of Buddhist monks and Catholic priests also continued to increase, and restrictions on church services for Protestants continued to diminish. Catholics across Vietnam were allowed to celebrate Christmas and Easter without significant difficulties. Some Protestants in the Central Highlands and in the north had difficulty celebrating at Christmastime but reported that they were allowed to celebrate Easter without much difficulty.

The Catholic Church reported continued easing of government control over church assignment of new clergy, and, during the reporting period, many new priests were ordained, including fifty-seven ordained in a ceremony conducted by a visiting Vatican Cardinal in November 2005. Most of these new priests took up their assignments in provincial benefices by the end of the reporting period. All bishoprics remained filled, and in late 2005, the Government facilitated a request to create a new diocese in the South and to consecrate a new bishop. Contact between Vatican authorities and the country's Catholics remained routine, and the Government maintained its regular, active dialogue with the Vatican on a range of issues, including Church leadership, organizational activities, and the prospect of establishing diplomatic relations. Negotiations on the establishment of diplomatic ties between the Vatican and the Government continued to increase in intensity during the reporting period.

Official harassment against Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang's Mennonite church in Ho Chu Minh City subsided substantially following the pastor's amnesty and release from prison in September 2005. In late May 2006 Pastor Quang was invited to a first-ever government seminar for house church organizations on the new legal framework on religion.

The HCMC-based New Life Fellowship Church, which catered to both foreigners and local Vietnamese, was prevented from gathering in HCMC hotels in August 2005 after it launched a separate service for citizens in contravention to the law. Since then, foreigners in the NLF have been able to gather in small groups at home. In April 2006 the NLF was able to hold its first large prayer meeting for foreigners on the grounds of a HCMC hotel for foreigners since August 2005. The NLF remains in discussion with city- and national-level officials to find a permanent, legal solution to its status.

Adherents of the Muslim Association of Vietnam continued to be able to practice their faith, including reciting daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and teaching the Qur'an. Several Muslims undertake the Hajj every year, most of them using assistance provided by foreign sponsors. During the period covered by this report, several Muslim students were studying abroad at the invitation of foreign governments. The Muslim community did not report any problems or difficulties with the Government.

France-based Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh was permitted to return to the country in January 2005 for a ten-week trip, his first after thirty-nine years of exile. Thich Nhat Hanh traveled widely through the country, met with large groups of Buddhist adherents, and spoke to intellectuals and political leaders, including Prime Minister Phan Van Khai. Many of Thich Nhat Hanh's comments were critical of the situation for Buddhist believers, and he called for an end to the practice of Buddhist monks holding public offices and for reconciliation between Buddhist groups. Thich Nhat Hanh was able to meet with UBCV leaders in Hue but not in Ho Chi Minh City.

During the reporting period, some religious groups were also allowed to convene large religious gatherings, such as the Catholic celebrations at La Vang, traditional pilgrimage events such as the Hung Kings' Festival, and the Hoa Hao Founding Day and commemoration of the founder's death, each with attendance estimated in the hundreds of thousands. House church Protestants were able to gather in large groups for special worship services in Ho Chi Minh City and elsewhere. In April 2006 the HCMC Government officially sanctioned the first large revival meeting for the Baptist house church community since 1975. Other house church leaders and government officials also attended the revival.

A number of religious prisoners were amnestied or otherwise released from prison during the period covered by this report. For instance, Brother Nguyen Thien Phung, a member of the Order of the Mother Co-Redemptrix, Tran Van Hoang, Tran Van Thanh, and Than Van Truong were amnestied September 2, 2005.

Catholic and Protestant groups reported that the Government continued to restore some previously owned properties, although progress on outstanding claims was generally very slow. For example, in January 2006 an ECVN congregation (one of fifteen legal congregations in the North registered since the mid-1960s) 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. For example, in May 2006 the CRA trained more than 600 provincial propaganda cadres from Northwest Highlands provinces to disseminate information on religion to the common people to reduce societal tensions arising between followers of traditional ethnic minority beliefs and Protestant converts.

In all, during the reporting period, the Government continued to address many concerns raised by the United States and other nations concerning religious freedom. Uneven approaches to implementation at the local level appeared to be the largest difficulty faced by the Government in enforcing its new religious regulations, though the CRA took steps to improve local officials' understanding of the laws on Protestant registration and other new policies.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

In general, there are amicable relations among the various religious groups and there were no known instances of societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the period covered by this report. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hue, there were some ecumenical dialogues among leaders of disparate religious communities. Buddhists, Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai reportedly sometimes cooperate on some social and charitable projects.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

In September 2004 the Secretary of State designated Vietnam a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) for the first time for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Subsequent to this, the ambassador at large for international religious freedom, together with the United States diplomatic mission in Vietnam, conducted multiple discussions with the Government to urge improvements in religious freedom. Senior U.S. officials and the Government worked closely together, resulting in an exchange of letters in May 2005 that covered the following issues: Full implementation of the new laws on religious activities; instruction of local authorities to strictly and completely adhere to the new legislation and ensure it compliance; facilitation of the process by which religious congregations are able to open houses of worship; and special consideration to prisoners and cases of concern raised by the United States during the granting of prisoner amnesties.

On June 21, 2005, the president of the United States and the prime minister of Vietnam discussed the status of religious freedom in the country.

In November 2005 the Secretary of State renewed Vietnam's CPC status but noted significant improvement in religious freedom during the year.

In February 2006 the U.S. Department of State's Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom traveled to Hanoi to resume the bilateral U.S./Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue.

The embassy in Hanoi and the consulate general in Ho Chi Minh City actively and regularly raised U.S. concerns about religious freedom with a wide variety of CPV leaders and government officials, including authorities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Public Security, and

other offices in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and the provinces. The mission also maintained regular contact with religious leaders and dissidents.

The ambassador at large for international religious freedom and staff traveled to various regions of the country on six occasions between 2003 and 2006 to meet religious leaders and government authorities. During an extended visit to Hanoi in February 2006 on the margins of the bilateral Human Rights Dialogue, the ambassador at large for international religious freedom, together with officials of the United States Mission in Vietnam, met with senior government officials from four ministries for continued discussions on a variety of religious freedom issues.

The U.S. ambassador, the consul general in Ho Chi Minh City, and other embassy and consulate officers have raised religious freedom issues with senior cabinet ministers, including the prime minister, the two deputy prime ministers, the foreign minister, other senior government officials, the head of the Office of Religious Affairs, deputy ministers of foreign affairs and public security, officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' External Relations Office in Ho Chi Minh City, chairpersons of Provincial People's Committees around the country, and other officials, particularly in the Central and Northwest Highlands. Embassy and consulate general officials maintained regular contact with the key government offices responsible for respect for human rights. Embassy and consulate general officers repeatedly informed government officials that a lack of progress on religious freedom and human rights was a significant impediment to an improved bilateral relationship.

The ambassador and other mission officers urged recognition of a broad spectrum of religious groups, including members of the UBCV, the Protestant house churches, and dissenting Hoa Hao and Cao Dai groups. They urged greater freedom for recognized religious groups. The ambassador and other mission officers repeatedly advocated ending restrictions on Thich Huyen Quang and Thich Quang Do, among others. The ambassador also requested that the Government investigate alleged abuses of religious believers and punish any officials found to be responsible. They, along with the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, continued to urge an end to forced renunciations and the punishment of officials involved, ask for the release of religious and political prisoners, and call for the registration and re-opening of house churches that had been closed.

Representatives of the embassy and the consulate general have frequent contact with leaders of major religious communities, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Muslims. In November 2004 the ambassador met with UBCV Patriarch Thich Huyen Quang and in December, he met with UBCV monk Thich Quang Do. Consulate general officers maintained regular contact with these and other UBCV Buddhist monks. Embassy and consulate general officers met with the cardinal of Ho Chi Minh City, the Catholic archbishops of Hue and Hanoi, and the bishops of Dak Lak, Gia Lai, and Kontum, Can Tho, Lang Son, Buon Ma Thuot, and Haiphong as well as other members of the Episcopal Conference. Embassy and consulate general officers also met repeatedly with leaders of various Protestant house churches and with leaders of the Muslim community. When traveling outside of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Embassy and consulate general officers regularly met with provincial religious affairs committees, village elders, local clergy, and believers.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,100 square miles, and a population of approximately 3.6 million. It had a largely homogeneous ethnic population, consisting of Ghegs in the north and Tosks in the south. The ethnic Greek communities, the largest minority group in the country, were located in the south. Other minorities included the Roma, the Egyptian community (an ethnic group similar to the Roma that does not speak the Roma language), Vlachs, and Macedonians.

The majority of citizens were secular in orientation after decades of rigidly enforced atheism under the communist regime, which ended in 1990. No reliable data were available on active participation in formal religious services, but estimates ranged from 25 to 40 percent. Despite such secularism, most citizens associated themselves with a traditional religious group. Citizens of Muslim background made up the largest traditional religious group (estimated at 65 to 70 percent of the population) and were 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 were estimated to represent approximately one-quarter of the country's Muslim population. In 1925, after the revolution of Ataturk and the Bektashis' expulsion from Turkey, the country became the world center of Bektashism, although it has not been recognized as such by the Government. In 2005, the Muslim community, historically known as the Albanian Muslim Community, resumed using the name "Albanian Islamic Community."

The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania (referred to as Orthodox) and the Roman Catholic Church were the other large denominations. An estimated 20 to 25 percent of the population belonged to communities that are traditionally Albanian Orthodox and approximately 10 percent to the Roman Catholic communities. The Orthodox Church became independent from Constantinople's authority in 1929 but was not recognized as autocephalous (independent) until 1937.

Muslims were found throughout the country but were concentrated mostly in the middle of the country and to a lesser extent in the south. The Orthodox lived mainly in the south and Roman Catholics in the north of the country; this division was not strict, however, particularly in the case of many urban centers, which had mixed populations. The Greek minority, concentrated in the south, belonged almost exclusively to the Orthodox Church. In addition to the four traditional religious groups, the country had substantial numbers of Protestants, Baha'is, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and other smaller religions. All reported that they freely carried out their religious activities.

According to the State Committee on Cults, during the period covered by this report, there were a total of 245 religious groups, organizations, and foundations other than the 4 traditional faiths active in the country. This number included 34 different Islamic organizations and 189 Protestant (Christian) organizations. The larg-

est foreign missionary groups were American, Western European, and Middle Eastern.

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. According to the 1998 Constitution, there is no official religion and all religions are equal; however, the predominant religious communities (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic) enjoy a greater degree of official recognition (e.g., national holidays) and social status based on their historical presence in the country. All registered religious groups have the right to hold bank accounts and to own property and buildings. Official holidays include religious holy days from all four predominant faiths. Religious movements may acquire the official status of a juridical person by registering with the Tirana District Court under the Law on Nonprofit Organizations, which recognizes the status of a nonprofit association regardless of whether the organization has a cultural, recreational, religious, or humanitarian character. The Government does not require registration or licensing of religious groups; however, the State Committee on Cults maintains records and statistics on foreign religious organizations that contact it for assistance. No groups reported difficulties registering during the period covered by this report. All religious communities have criticized the Government for its unwillingness to grant them tax-exempt status. Since 2003, foreign religious missionaries have been exempted from the residence permit tax.

The State Committee on Cults is charged with regulating the relations between the Government and all religious communities, large and small. Following parliamentary elections in July 2005, a new government came to power in September 2005. In the previous government the chairman of the Cults Committee had the status of a deputy minister and reported directly to the prime minister. In the current government, the Cults Committee has been moved within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports. The Cults Committee recognizes the equality of religious communities and respects their independence. The Cults Committee is charged with working to protect freedom of religion and to promote inter-religious cooperation and understanding. The Cults 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 one-year residency permits and not five-year permits, as allowed under law for residents who have been in the country more than two years. The new government promised to issue longer period permits but had not yet begun to do so. No single religious organization has been singled out; all have been treated equally. In 2004, the State Committee on Cults assisted 1,084 foreign missionaries in obtaining residency permits.

There is no law or regulation forcing religious organizations to notify the Cults Committee of their activities; however, Article 10 of the constitution calls for separate bilateral agreements to regulate relations between the Government and religious communities. At the end of the period covered by this report, only the Roman Catholic Church has finalized such an agreement with the Government; this agreement entered into force in March 2005. The State Committee on Cults had a clear mandate to negotiate agreements with the three remaining groups by the end of August 2006 and convened a working group in late May for this purpose. The Albanian Evangelical Alliance (VUSH), a Protestant umbrella organization, approached the Cults Committee and also asked to negotiate a bilateral agreement, but had not received a response to its request by the end of the period covered by this report.

Additionally, the State Committee on Cults drafted a law on religion to deal with all religious communities according to a common standard; however, no action had been taken on the draft by the end of the period covered by this report.

According to official figures, religious communities, organizations and foundations managed 101 educational institutions, out of which 15 were officially religious-affiliated schools, with more than 2,600 students. Under law, the Ministry of Education must license such schools, and the curricula must comply with national education standards. Both the Roman Catholic and Muslim groups operated numerous state-licensed schools and have reported no problems in obtaining new licenses for new schools. During the reporting period, VUSH reported that it was unable to obtain the necessary licenses, despite guarantees that they would teach the state curricula

and employ only state-accredited instructors. The Orthodox Church and the Bektashis operate only strictly religious educational centers for the training of clerics.

The Orthodox Church's 1954 statute states that its archbishop must have Albanian citizenship; however, the archbishop during the reporting period was a Greek citizen who was still seeking Albanian citizenship. The Government had not taken action on his citizenship application by the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government is secular. 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 families regarding the way they raise their children with respect to religious practices.

In 1967, the former communist government banned all religious practices and expropriated the property of the established Islamic, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and other churches. The Government has not returned all the properties and religious objects under its control that were confiscated during the communist regime. Property restitution remained one of the greatest challenges facing the religious communities. All four major traditional communities had substantial property claims that remained unresolved. In cases in which religious buildings were returned, the Government often failed to return the land that surrounds the buildings, sometimes because of redevelopment claims by private individuals who began farming it or using it for other purposes.

In July 2004, Parliament approved a law on the restitution and compensation of properties confiscated during the communist regime. According to this law, religious communities have the same rights as private individuals in matters of property restitution or compensation. However, the religious communities question the law's limitation on property restitution to 150 acres. The Cults Committee recently announced that the new government intended to establish a fund for monetary compensation. Moreover, the Government announced plans to remove bureaucratic and legalistic hurdles that have hindered the return of confiscated properties. Specifically, the Government will no longer require that religious organizations produce titles and deeds proving original ownership before making restitution.

The Orthodox Church began construction of a new cathedral on a parcel of land that it was given as compensation for other land seized by the communist government. Despite this progress, the Orthodox Church claimed a lack of action on a number of other property claims throughout the country, as well as difficulty in recovering some religious icons and precious manuscripts. Additionally, both the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church were still trying to regain possession of their archives that were seized by the communist government and continued to be held in the national archives.

Although the Roman 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 is eventually paid out it expects to receive compensation as well. The 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 located across from the parliament building in the center of Tirana on which a mosque once stood. However, it was not issued the necessary building permit to allow construction of a new mosque. Under the new Urban Regulatory Plan for Tirana, another parcel of land in central Tirana, also owned by the Islamic Community, has been set aside for this purpose. The Islamic Community has rejected this location, however, in favor of the other site. The Bektashi community is also seeking compensation from the Government for victims of religious maltreatment during the communist regime.

Over the reporting period, VUSH has continued its efforts to expand its relationship with the country's various public institutions, including the Cults Committee, state-controlled media, and universities.

Media coverage of the Jehovah's Witnesses improved since the previous reporting period, during which the organization was the subject of false media accounts of youth members committing suicide. Over the reporting period there was only one such article published. The organization reported that in this instance the Government acted cooperatively and responsibly in helping to quell false rumors. The organization reported that they have faced no other hindrance in their ability to carry out their programs in the country.

There were approximately six hundred Jews in the country before World War II. During the war, many Jews from other countries found shelter in the country, but

almost all remaining Jews immigrated to Israel after 1991. There were believed to be fewer than one hundred Jews left in the country, and there were no reports of synagogues or Jewish community centers functioning in the country. The Archaeology Institute of the Albanian Academy of Sciences, together with archaeologists from the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology, was excavating an ancient synagogue in the southern city of Saranda 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Society is largely secular. Intermarriage among members of different religions is extremely common. Citizens take pride in the tolerance and understanding that prevail among them.

In contrast to past years, representatives of the Orthodox Church reported that there were no acts of vandalism carried out against its churches or property. The Catholic Church, however, reported that there were two cases in which public crosses were destroyed, both in the Shkodra region. That city was also the location of a controversy regarding the public placement of a statue of Mother Theresa (an ethnic Albanian born in Macedonia). A leader of the Islamic community of Shkodra initially objected, claiming that Mother Theresa was a Catholic figure and therefore her statue should not be placed on public property. The national leadership of the Albanian Islamic Community, however, announced that it supported erection of the statue on the ground that Mother Theresa was a national figure. Ultimately the Shkodra Islamic community rescinded its objections, stating that it, too, recognized that Mother Theresa was a national symbol.

The investigation into the 2003 killing of Sali Tivari, the former General Secretary of the Islamic Community, remained open 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. The U.S. Government has employed numerous initiatives to further religious freedom and tolerance. The U.S. Embassy continues to urge the Government to address outstanding religious property claims and to return buildings, land, and other property to the denominations that lost them under communist rule. Embassy officers, including the chief of mission, meet frequently (both in formal office calls and at representational events) with the heads of the major religious communities in the country.

The embassy has been active in urging tolerance and moderation as a continued hallmark of society. The embassy has provided grants to local organizations to promote interfaith tolerance and understanding and to support the teaching of civic affairs and religious tolerance in secondary schools, including schools operated by faith-based organizations. The embassy has also 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." The embassy supported other projects that support and strengthen civic education in religious-affiliated schools to help ensure that tradition is preserved as new forms of religious practice appear in the country.

During the reporting period, 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 values that can contribute to a more democratic, diverse and tolerant society.

The project also extended cooperation with the Education Department of the Albanian Islamic Community, which, as a result, introduced constructive, cooperative civic education curricula into Muslim-affiliated schools in Tirana. The project replicated this experience in other Muslim-affiliated schools throughout the country.

This project also provided in-service training for teachers in faith-based nonpublic schools, which have agreed to teach civic education. The training offered knowledge and skills for effective civic education in their schools, which could help to further strengthen the relations between civic and faith-based education, provide students in such schools with civic knowledge and skills, and also improve the climate for further cooperation between public schools and faith-based nonpublic schools.

Through a USAID project entitled "Fostering Religious Harmony in Albania," the U.S. Government supported the peaceful coexistence of different religious groups and fostered greater understanding among persons of different faiths. This project seeks to establish dialogue and cooperation among members of the different religions present in the country at all levels of the organizations.

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 not available to other religious groups.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 180.7 square miles and a population of 78,549 (December 2005 figure). Very few official statistics were available relative to religion; however, traditionally, approximately 90 percent of the population is Catholic. The population consisted largely of immigrants from Spain, Portugal, and France, with full citizens representing less than 30 percent of the total. The immigrants were also generally Catholic. It was estimated that, of the Catholic population, approximately half were active church attendees. Other religious groups included Muslims (who primarily were represented among the approximately two thousand North African immigrants and were split between two groups, one more fundamentalist); Hinduism; the New Apostolic Church; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); several Protestant denominations, including the Anglican Church; the Reunification Church; Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews.

An estimated one hundred Jews lived in the country. Eight years ago, the Jewish community opened a synagogue and a cultural center. The group suffered no discrimination and was well integrated into the overall society.

Foreign missionaries were active and operated without restriction. For example, the Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses proselytized from door to door.

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 also a national holiday. The celebration does not negatively affect any religious group.

There is no law that clearly requires legal registration and approval of religious groups and religious worship. The law of associations is very general and does not mention specifically religious affairs. A consolidated register of associations records all types of associations, including religious groups. Registration is not compulsory; however, groups must register or reregister in order to be considered for the support that the Government provides to nongovernmental organizations. To register or reregister, groups must provide the association statutes, the foundation agreement, a statement certifying the names of persons appointed to official or board positions in the organization, and a patrimony declaration that identifies the inheritance or endowment of the organization. There were no known reports of rejected applications.

The authorities reportedly expressed some concern as to what treatment groups, whose actions may be considered injurious to public health, safety, morals, or order, should receive. The law does not limit any such groups, although it does contain a provision that no one may be "forced to join or remain in an association against his/her will."

In spite of negotiations between the Muslim community and the Government, no mosque had been built. However, the Muslim community practiced its religion without restriction in places of worship scattered throughout the country.

Instruction in the tenets of the Catholic faith is available in public schools on an optional basis, outside of both regular school hours and the time frame set aside for elective school activities, such as civics or ethics. The Catholic Church provides teachers for religion classes, and the Government pays their salaries. The Islamic Cultural Center provided approximately fifty 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 has been responsive to certain needs of the Muslim community. On occasion the Government has made public facilities available to various religious organizations for religious activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In early 2005, under the sponsorship of the foreign minister, a group of persons attended a meeting organized for the first time among Catholics, Buddhist, Hindus, and Muslims which was presided over by the Bishop of Seu d'Urgell Joan Enric Vives i Sicilia.

In 2004, UNESCO opened an interreligious dialogue in the country. The project consisted of various meetings to promote peace and reconciliation among members of different religious groups.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Societal attitudes between and among different 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 tended to be immigrants and otherwise not integrated fully into the local community, there appeared to be little or no obstacle to their practicing their own religions.

There were no significant ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

According to a report of the European Commission on Andorra, the country had no problems related to discrimination but the society had racial prejudices, an issue that could be exacerbated if the economic situation worsens.

An opinion poll published in 2003 by the Institute of Andorran Studies on the "values and traditions of the Andorran Society" indicated that 52 percent saw themselves as "very religious people."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and religious freedom. Both the U.S. Ambassador, resident in Madrid, and the Consul General, resident in Barcelona, have met with Bishop Joan Enric Vives i Sicilia, the leader of the Catholic community, to discuss religious toleration. The U.S. Consul General specifically discussed with and urged the foreign minister to take a more proactive stance in integrating the Muslim community into society.

ARMENIA

The constitution, as amended December 8, 2005, provides for freedom of religion; however, the law places some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of minority faiths, and there were some restrictions in practice. The Armenian Apos-

tolic Church, which has formal legal status as the national church, enjoys some privileges not available to other religious groups.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Some denominations reported occasional acts of discrimination by mid- or low-level government officials and isolated incidents of police harassment. An amendment to the 2004 law on alternative military service took effect on January 26, 2006, criminalizing evasion of alternative labor service. Conscientious objectors maintained, however, that military control of the alternative labor service amounted to unacceptable military service.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, societal attitudes toward some minority religious groups were ambivalent.

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 emphasizes to authorities that continued eligibility for the $235 million Millennium Challenge Compact remains contingent upon the Government's performance in meeting good governance indicators, which include standards of respect for religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,500 square miles and a population of 3 million.

The country is ethnically homogeneous; approximately 98 percent of the population was ethnically Armenian. Many Azeris left the country during the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh from 1988 to 1994, increasing the country's religious and ethnic homogeneity. Religious observance was strongly discouraged in the Soviet era, leading to a sharp decline in the number of active churches and priests, the closure of virtually all monasteries, and the nearly complete absence of religious education. As a result, the number of active religious practitioners was relatively low. For many citizens, Christian identity was an ethnic trait, with only a loose connection to religious belief. An estimated 90 percent of citizens nominally belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church, an Eastern Christian denomination with its spiritual center at the Etchmiadzin cathedral and monastery. The head of the church, Catholicos Garegin II (alternate spelling Karekin), was elected in 1999 at Etchmiadzin with the participation of Armenian delegates from around the world.

There were comparatively small communities of other religious groups. There was no reliable census data on religious minorities, and reports from congregants themselves varied significantly. The Government does not provide official figures for numbers of religious adherents, but congregants offered the following unconfirmed estimates: Catholic, both Roman and Mekhitarist (Armenian Uniate) (120,000); Yezidi, an ethnically Kurdish cultural group whose religion includes elements derived from Zoroastrianism, Islam, and animism (40,000 nominal adherents); unspecified "charismatic" Christian (10,000); Jehovah's Witnesses (8,750); Armenian Evangelical Church (8,000); Molokan, an ethnically Russian pacifist Christian group that split from the Russian Orthodox Church in the 17th century (5,000); Baptist (2,000); the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (2,000); Greek Orthodox (1,200); Seventh-day Adventist (950); Pentecostal (700); Jewish (600); and Baha'i (200). There was no estimate of the number of atheists.

Yezidis were concentrated primarily in agricultural areas around Mount Aragats, northwest of the capital, Yerevan. Armenian Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christians were concentrated in the northern region, while most Jews, Mormons, and Baha'is were located in Yerevan. In Yerevan there was also a small community of Muslims, including Kurds, Iranians, Indians, and temporary residents from the Middle East.

Several minority religious groups sponsor missionary programs in the country, including both expatriate and local participants. Levels of membership in minority religious groups remained relatively unchanged.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution, as amended on December 8, 2005, provides for freedom of religion and "the exclusive mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy 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 stipulates some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of faiths other than the Armenian Apostolic Church. The constitution also provides for freedom of conscience, including the right either to believe or to adhere to atheism. The 1991 Law on Freedom of

Conscience, amended in 1997 and again in 2001, establishes the separation of church and state but grants the Armenian Apostolic Church official status as the national church.

Extended negotiations between the Government and the Armenian Apostolic Church resulted in a 2000 memorandum providing a framework for the two sides to negotiate a concordat. Although they had not concluded negotiations by the end of the period covered by this report, the Government and the church used the memorandum as a basis for dispute resolution and policy agreements.

The law requires all religious denominations and organizations to register in order to operate without restrictions. There were no reports of the Government refusing registration to religious groups that were qualified for registration under the law. The Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities, which replaced the former Council on Religious Affairs (CRA), oversees religious affairs and coordinates activities with the cabinet's chief of staff. A high-ranking official from the former CRA serves as the prime minister's advisor on religious affairs. The Office of the State Registrar registers religious entities, and the Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities performs a consultative role in the registration process. To qualify for registration, petitioning organizations must "be free from materialism and of a purely spiritual nature," and must subscribe to a doctrine based on "historically recognized holy scriptures." A religious organization must have at least 200 adult members. Religious groups are not required to register, but unregistered religious organizations may not publish newspapers or magazines, rent meeting places, broadcast programs on television or radio, or officially sponsor the visas of visitors. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had registered fifty-six religious organizations, some of which were individual congregations within the same denomination.

Yerevan's one surviving eighteenth-century mosque, which was restored with Iranian funding, was open for regular Friday prayers. Although not registered as a religious facility, the Government did not restrict Muslims from praying there.

The law permits religious education in state schools. Only personnel authorized and trained by the Government may teach in schools. The history of the Armenian Apostolic Church forms the basis of this curriculum; many schools cover global religions in elementary school and the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church in middle school. Students may choose not to attend religious education classes. Religious groups are not allowed to provide religious instruction in schools, although registered groups may do so in private homes to children of their members. On occasion, priests from the Armenian Apostolic Church teach classes in religious history; however, the use of public school buildings for religious "indoctrination" is illegal.

The military employs Armenian Apostolic chaplains for each division, but no other religious groups are represented in the chaplaincy.

The Government's human rights ombudsman and the head of the Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities met with many minority religious organizations during the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, most registered religious groups reported no serious legal impediments to their activities. However, the 1991 freedom of conscience law prohibits "proselytizing" (undefined in the law) and restricts unregistered groups from publishing, broadcasting, or inviting official visitors to the country. The prohibition on proselytizing applies to all groups, including the Armenian Apostolic Church; however, the term used for proselytizing implies that someone has been taken away from a "true" faith, and the prohibition effectively restricts only minority religious groups.

According to the head of the Department of Religious Affairs and National Minorities, some minority religious groups, including the Molokans and some Yezidi groups, have not sought registration.

Although the law prohibits foreign funding of foreign-based denominations, the Government has not enforced the ban and considers it unenforceable. A 1991 law required all religious organizations, except the Armenian Apostolic Church, to obtain prior permission to engage in public religious activities, travel abroad, or invite foreign guests to the country. In 2001 this law was rescinded by presidential order and, in practice, no travel restrictions were imposed on any religious denomination.

On July 13, 2005, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) officials reported that police officers briefly detained, harassed, and threatened two foreign missionaries. The missionaries said that one of the officers, after warning them to leave the country, placed the barrel of his unloaded gun against one missionary's head and pulled the trigger. Church officials filed a police report, and the Government opened an investigation. According to the Department of Religious Affairs and

National Minorities, Armenian Apostolic Church officials filed a counter-complaint against the Mormons within a week of the incident, alleging the missionaries were illegally proselytizing on church grounds. Police officials claimed the officers questioned the missionaries and asked them to stay away from the church but denied that the questioning constituted harassment. On October 4, 2005, a police inspector sent Mormon representatives a letter informing members that the national police intended to drop the investigation and leave the incident unresolved. Other religious groups reported isolated events involving police officials questioning missionaries and their acquaintances about their activities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The law on alternative military service took effect in 2004 and allowed conscientious objectors, subject to government panel approval, to perform either noncombatant military or civil service duties rather than serve as conscripted military personnel. The law was applied to subsequent draftees and those serving prison terms for draft evasion. Conscientious objectors maintained, however, that military control of the alternative labor service amounted to unacceptable military service. An amendment to the law, which took effect on January 26, 2006, criminalized evasion of alternative labor service.

According to leaders of Jehovah's Witnesses in Yerevan, twenty-five members of their religious group remained in prison for refusal, on conscientious and religious grounds, to perform military service or alternative labor service. An additional eighteen members signed statements saying they would not leave the country pending the completion of preliminary investigations, and six more were assigned conditional punishment ranging from one to three years. 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. Twelve of those in prison reportedly received two-year sentences.

There were reports that hazing of new conscripts was more severe for minority group members such as Yezidis and Jehovah's Witnesses. Some Yezidi leaders reported that police and local authorities subjected their religious community to discrimination. Other Yezidi leaders denied the allegations.

There was no officially sponsored violence reported against minority religious groups during the period covered by this report. Other than Jehovah's Witnesses who were conscientious objectors, there were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, societal attitudes toward some minority religious groups were ambivalent.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is a member of the World Council of Churches and, despite doctrinal differences, has friendly official relations with major Christian denominations, including the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and some Protestant churches.

Suppressed through seventy years of Soviet rule, the Armenian Apostolic Church has trained priests and committed material resources to fill the spiritual void created by the demise of communist ideology. Nontraditional religious organizations are viewed with suspicion. Representatives of foreign†based denominations frequently cited as evidence statements including "one God, one country, one church," noting they had been warned against "stealing souls" from the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Societal attitudes toward most minority religious groups were ambivalent. Many citizens were not religiously observant, but the link between religion and Armenian ethnicity is strong.

According to some observers, the general population expressed negative attitudes about Jehovah's Witnesses, because 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 Apostolic Church clerics and experienced occasional societal discrimination. The press re-

ported a number of complaints for allegedly illegal proselytizing lodged by citizens against members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Some members of the press stoked suspicion of nontraditional religious organizations. On April 4, 2006, an opposition newspaper published a short editorial alleging that "a top police official" had information that "religious sects" including Mormons and Pentecostals had enlisted well-known criminals to protect the "sects'" interests against the Government. The paper's publishers claimed the unnamed source of the article was "credible" and that the allegations were factual, but despite repeated requests, they declined to elaborate on them.

On April 5, 2006, a pro-government tabloid published a short editorial entitled, "Is the American University of Armenia being Mormonized?" The writer claimed that the newspaper had learned from sources that "a Mormon" would be appointed vice rector of the American University. According to the authors, if the rumors were true, the country would have taken a serious step, negative in the tabloid's view, toward "Mormonization."

Flanked by Armenian Apostolic priests during an April 19, 2006, press conference, Armenian Center for Rehabilitation and Assistance to Victims of Destructive Cults Director Alexander Amaryan continued his public assertions that the presence of nontraditional religious institutions "threatens the spiritual life of Armenia." Armenian Apostolic priests alleged "religious sects," which they identified as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, "conquered members of our flock" by "abducting children and church members, and criticizing national traditions."

Unlike in previous years, the Jewish community reported no incidents of verbal harassment during the period covered by this report. On March 18, 2005, a court issued a three-year suspended sentence to the leader of the Union of Armenian Aryans, in response to his conviction on charges of public hostility for calling for the country to be "purified" of Jews and Yezidis.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. ambassador and embassy officials maintain close contact with the Catholicos at Etchmiadzin and with leaders of other religious and ecumenical groups in the country. During the period covered by this report, U.S. officials consistently raised the issue of alternatives to military service with government officials. The embassy also maintained regular contact with resident and visiting regional representatives of foreign-based religious groups such as the Mormons and raised their concerns with the Government. Embassy officials closely monitor trials related to issues of religious freedom and take an active role in policy fora and nongovernmental organization roundtables regarding religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy hosted several roundtable meetings and receptions in honor of U.S. representatives of religious organizations. Leaders of local minority religious groups were regularly welcomed at these events.

AUSTRIA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there was some societal mistrust and discrimination against members of some nonrecognized religious groups, particularly those referred to as "sects." There was no marked deterioration in the atmosphere of religious tolerance in the country during the period covered by this report.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 32,369 square miles, and its population was an estimated 8.2 million. The largest minority groups were Croatian, Slovene, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, and Roma. In the past several years, the country experienced a rise in immigration from countries such as Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which increased the number of Muslims in the country.

According to the 2001 census, membership in major religions was as follows: Roman Catholic Church, 74.0 percent; Lutheran and Presbyterian churches (Evangelical Church—Augsburger and Helvetic confessions), 4.7 percent; Islamic community, 4.2 percent; Jewish community, 0.1 percent; Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), 2.2 percent; other Christian churches, 0.9 percent; and other non-Christian religious groups, 0.2 percent. Atheists accounted for 12 percent, and 2 percent did not indicate a religious affiliation.

The vast majority of groups termed "sects" by the Government were small organizations with fewer than 100 members. Among the larger groups was the Church of Scientology, with between 5,000 and 6,000 members, and the Unification Church, with approximately 700 adherents throughout the country. Other groups found in the country included Divine Light Mission, Eckankar, Hare Krishna, the Holosophic community, the Osho movement, Sahaja Yoga, Sai Baba, Sri Chinmoy, Transcendental Meditation, the Center for Experimental Society Formation, Fiat Lux, Universal Life, and The Family.

The provinces of Carinthia and Burgenland had somewhat higher percentages of Protestants than the national average. The number of Muslims was higher than the national average in Vienna and the province of Vorarlberg, where industry drew a disproportionately higher number of guest workers from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia.

According to a poll by FESSEL–GfK, 78 percent of respondents said that they belonged to a church or religious group. Of that number, 2 percent attended services more than once a week, 15 percent attended weekly, 17 percent attended a minimum of once a month, 34 percent attended several times a year (on special occasions), and 32 percent never attended.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government is secular. The Roman Catholic Church is the predominant religion; many Roman Catholic holidays are also government holidays.

The status of religious organizations is governed by the 1874 Law on Recognition of Churches and by the 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities, which establishes the status of "confessional communities." Religious organizations 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 thirteen officially recognized religious societies.

The Government recognizes thirteen religious bodies as religious societies: The Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant churches (Lutheran and Presbyterian, called "Augsburger" and "Helvetic" confessions), the Islamic community, the Old Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the New Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Methodist Church of Austria, the Buddhist community, and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities imposed new criteria on religious groups to achieve religious society status, although it allowed previously recognized societies to retain their status. New criteria included a twenty-year period of existence (at least ten 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 four of the thirteen recognized religious (Catholic, Protestant, Islamic Community, and Eastern Orthodox) groups would meet this membership requirement. Of

the unrecognized religious groups, only the Jehovah's Witnesses would 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.

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 six-month waiting period from the time of application to the Ministry of Education and Culture. According to the ministry, as of May 2006, thirteen groups had applied for the status of religious confessional community, and ten were granted the new status. The Church of Scientology and the Hindu Mandir Association withdrew their applications. The Hindu Mandir Association reapplied under the name Hindu Religious Community and was granted the new status. The ministry rejected the application of the Sahaja Yoga group in 1998. Since then, its decision has been upheld in the Constitutional Court and Administrative Court.

The ten religious groups that constitute confessional communities according to the law are the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baha'i Faith, the Baptists, the Evangelical Alliance, the Movement for Religious Renewal, the Free Christian Community (Pentecostalists), the Pentecostal Community of God, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Hindu Religious Community, and the Mennonites.

Religious groups that do not qualify for either religious society or confessional community status may apply to become associations under the Law of Associations. Associations are corporations under law and have many of the same rights as confessional communities, including the right to own real estate. Some groups have organized as associations, even while applying for recognition as religious societies.

There are no restrictions on missionary activities. 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. Administrative procedures adopted in 1997 for certain unrecognized groups, which exempted 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 or family-based. New visa laws that became effective in January 2006 will change the implementation of these procedures, possibly resulting in an increased difficulty for members of this group to obtain resident permits.

In 2003, the Government opened the first Buddhist cemetery in Europe within Vienna's Central Cemetery. As of May 2006, construction continued on the new Islamic Cemetery in Vienna's Liesing district. This construction site was the target of an arson attack in April 2006. Despite the attack, the Islamic Community hoped that the cemetery would be in operation by the end of 2006.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, 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 obstruct claims to recognition, and formalize a second-class status for nonrecognized groups. Some experts have questioned the 1998 law's constitutionality.

Although the Ministry of Education granted Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a confessional community in 1998, they were denied recognition as a religious society under the 1874 law in 1997. A complaint filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses with the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) in 1998, arguing that the group had not yet been granted full status as a religious entity in the country under the law despite a two-decade struggle, remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. On July 5, 2005, the ECHR ruled that the case was admissible. 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.

The State of Lower Austria and the City of Vienna funded a counseling center of a controversial nongovernmental organization (NGO), GSK, which actively works against sects and cults. GSK distributes information to schools and the general public and runs a counseling center for those who believe they have been negatively affected by cults or sects. Several provinces funded offices that provided 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 social security and generations 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.

Prisoners who belong to nonrecognized religious groups are entitled to pastoral care. Some groups have reported experiencing problems with access to pastoral care in isolated instances; however, there were no allegations of widespread problems.

The Government provides funding for religious instruction in public schools and places of worship for children belonging to any of the thirteen officially recognized religious societies. The Government does not offer such funding to nonrecognized religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. In some cases, religious societies decide that the administrative cost of providing religious instruction is too great to warrant providing such courses in all schools. Attendance in religious instruction is mandatory unless students formally withdraw at the beginning of the academic year; students under the age of fourteen need parental permission to withdraw from instruction.

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 143 anti-Semitic incidents in 2005, including 4 physical attacks. The incidents included name-calling, graffiti/defacement, threatening letters, anti-Semitic Internet postings, property damage, vilifying letters and telephone calls, and physical attacks. The European Union's Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia has declared in the past that anti-Semitism in the country was typically characterized by diffuse and traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes rather than by acts of physical aggression.

The Anti-Defamation League's May 2005 report measured attitudes and opinions toward Jews in twelve European countries, including Austria. More than a third of Austrian respondents believed that Jews were more loyal to Israel than to Austria, and 46 percent of Austrian respondents believed that Jews talked too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust. However, these figures were down from the 2004 survey in which 46 percent answered affirmatively to the first question, and 54 percent to the second.

The Government strictly enforces its anti-neo-Nazi legislation, which prohibits neo-Nazi acts, including incitement to neo-Nazi activity and the glorification of National Socialism. In November 2005, British historian David Irving was arrested on a 1989 warrant in which he was charged with denying the existence of gas chambers at Auschwitz. On February 20, 2006, he was found guilty and sentenced to three years in prison.

The Government also provides police protection for Jewish community institutions.

On April 26, 2005, the Vienna Criminal Court convicted a former member of the Upper House of Parliament to a suspended one-year prison sentence on grounds of violating neo-Nazi law. In public interviews in 2005, the former parliamentarian had said that the questions on whether gas chambers existed during the Third Reich should be "examined."

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Relations among the thirteen officially recognized religious societies were 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 had 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. In early 2006, a new interreligious platform for tolerance was founded. Billed as an "initiative for a cooperative future in Austria," the group "Christian and Muslim" 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.

There were no reports of violence or vigilante action against members of religious minorities. However, some societal mistrust and discrimination continued against members of some nonrecognized 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. Some observers believed the existence of and the activities of the Federal Office of Sect Issues and similar offices at the state level fostered societal discrimination against minority religious groups.

Members of sects continued to complain that the Government lacks an objective stance when dealing with or representing groups they consider to be "sects." The sects claimed that the Government relies too heavily on isolated cases of persons who have had negative experiences with a group, rather than speaking directly to the vast majority of members who make no complaint.

The Church of Scientology has reported that individual Scientologists have experienced discrimination in hiring.

Muslims complained about incidents of societal discrimination and verbal harassment. Muslim women reported difficulties in the job market when potential employers learned they wear a headscarf. Victims can benefit from the Equal Treatment Bill, which implemented the EU Anti-Discrimination and Anti-Racism Guidelines and took effect on July 1, 2004, to take action in court. Women who wear the headscarf also reported that they experienced harassment in public areas. From March to December 2005, there were eleven cases of discrimination based on religion brought before the Equal Rights Commissioner.

The Muslim cemetery being constructed in Vienna's Liesing district was the target of an arson attack in April 2006.

Compulsory school curricula provide for anti-bias and tolerance education as part of the civics education and as a focus across various subjects, including history and German classes. The Ministry of Education also conducts training projects with the Anti-Defamation League in this context.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government 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 ambassador and other embassy officers regularly met with religious and political leaders to reinforce the U.S. Government's commitment to religious freedom and tolerance, and discussed the concerns of NGOs and religious communities regarding the Government's policies towards religion.

Embassy officials regularly met with government officials, NGOs, and leaders of religious organizations to discuss the status of religious freedom in the country. American representatives repeatedly voiced their concerns to the Government on the strict requirements for religious recognition in the country.

During the period covered by this report, the embassy maintained an active dialogue with members of the Jewish and Muslim Communities, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Scientology, and other religious groups.

The embassy highlighted religious freedom and tolerance in its programs. In 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 restrictions; however, there were some abuses and restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Some religious groups reported delays in and denials of registration while others indicated that they either received or expect to receive their registration. There continued to be some limitations upon the ability of groups to import religious literature than in previous years. Most religious groups met without government interference. However, local authorities monitored religious services, and officials at times harassed nontraditional religious groups.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there was popular prejudice against Muslims who convert to non-Islamic faiths and hostility towards groups that proselytize, particularly evangelical Christian and missionary groups.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy is engaged actively in monitoring religious freedom and maintains contact with the Government and a wide range of religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

According to official figures, the country has a total area of 33,774 square miles, and its population was approximately 7.9 million. There were no reliable statistics on memberships in various religious groups; however, according to official figures approximately 96 percent of the population was Muslim. The rest of the population adhered to other faiths or consisted of nonbelievers. Among the Muslim majority, religious observance was relatively low, and Muslim identity tended to be based more on culture and ethnicity than religion. According to the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA), the Muslim population was approximately 65 percent Shi'a and 35 percent Sunni; differences traditionally have not been defined sharply.

The vast majority of Christians were Russian Orthodox whose identity, like that of Muslims, tended to be based as much on culture and ethnicity as religion. Christians were concentrated in the urban areas of Baku and Sumgayit.

An estimated 15,000 Jews, constituting the vast majority of the country's Jewish community, lived in Baku. Smaller communities also existed in and around Guba and elsewhere. Most of the country's Jews belonged to one of two groups: The "Mountain Jews," descendents of Jews who sought refuge in the northern part of the country more than two thousand years ago, and a smaller group of "Ashkenazi" Jews, descendents of European Jews who migrated to the country during Russian and Soviet rule.

These four groups (Shi'a, Sunni, Russian Orthodoxy, and Jews) were considered traditional religious groups. There also have been small congregations of Evangelical Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Molokans (Russian Orthodox Old-Believers), Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'is in the country for more than one hundred years. In the last ten years, a number of new religious groups considered foreign or nontraditional have been established, including "Wahhabi" Muslims, Pentecostal and evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hare Krishnas.

There were fairly sizeable expatriate Christian and Muslim communities in the capital city of 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 form 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." In January 2006 the Government announced its intention to amend the law on religious freedom to restrict the political activities of religious groups.

A number of legal provisions enable the Government to regulate religious groups, including a requirement in the law on religious freedom that religious organizations be registered by the Government. The State Committee for Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA), which replaced the Department of Religious Affairs in 2001, assumed responsibility for the registration of religious groups from the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). Government authorities gave the SCWRA and its chairman broad powers over registration; control over the publication, import, and distribution of religious literature; and the ability to suspend the activities of religious groups violating the law. In addition, Muslim religious groups must receive a letter of approval from the Caucasus Muslim Board (CMB) before they can be registered by the SCWRA. On June 27, 2006, the president of the country dismissed the chairman of the SCWRA. No public reason was given for the dismissal; at the end of the reporting period the Government had not announced a new SCWRA chairman.

Registration enables a religious organization to maintain a bank account, rent property, and generally act as a legal entity. Unregistered organizations are exposed to allegations that they are illegal and find it difficult, but not impossible, to function. Unregistered groups were more vulnerable to attacks and closures by local authorities. In 2001 religious groups were called upon to re-register with the SCWRA; however, the registration process is burdensome, and there are frequent, sometimes lengthy delays in obtaining registration

To register, religious groups must complete a seven-step application process that is arbitrary and restrictive. In 2004 groups reported that SCWRA employees charged with handling registration-related paperwork repeatedly argued over the language in statutes and also instructed some groups on how to organize themselves. Religious groups are permitted to appeal registration denials to the courts. However, appellate court records for the period of this report cannot verify whether any appeals were adjudicated.

During the reporting period, the Government registered twenty-seven religious groups and rejected the applications of six religious groups, five of which the SCWRA identified as non-Muslim applicant groups. Since the call for re-registration, 347 groups have successfully registered, compared with 406 that were registered under the previous law. The majority of the registered groups were Muslim. The SCWRA estimated that two thousand religious groups are in operation; many have not filed for registration or re-registration. One of the minority religious communities that has faced re-registration problems in the past is the Baptist denomination. Of its five main churches, three have successfully re-registered; however, in 2005 the SCWRA again rejected the applications of the Baptist churches in Aliabad and Neftchala, which remained unregistered.

Under the law on religious freedom, political parties cannot engage in religious activity, and religious leaders are forbidden from seeking public office. Religious facilities may not be used for political purposes. In the aftermath of the November 2005 parliamentary elections, the SCWRA announced plans to amend the law on religious freedom to further tighten restrictions the political activities of religious leaders. The drafting of the amendments remained in its preliminary stage as of the end of the reporting period.

The law on religious freedom, which the Government enforces, prohibits foreigners from proselytizing. In July 2005 the Government did not renew the visa of the Swedish pastor of the Cathedral of Praise church in Baku, although there were no other reported visa denials during the reporting period. The law permits the production and dissemination of religious literature with the approval of the SCWRA; however, the authorities also appeared to selectively restrict individuals from importing and distributing religious materials. The procedure for obtaining permission to import religious literature remained burdensome, but religious organizations reported that the process had improved in the past year and that the SCWRA appeared to be handling requests more effectively.

Registered Muslim organizations are subordinate to the CMB, a Soviet-era Muftiate, which appoints Muslim clerics to mosques, periodically monitors sermons, and organizes annual pilgrimages to Mecca for the Hajj. Although it remains the first point of control for Muslim groups wanting to register with the SCWRA according to the law on religious freedom, it also has been subject to interference by the SCWRA. It has attempted to share control with the CMB over the appointment and certification of clerics and internal financial control of the country's mosques. Some Muslim religious leaders objected to interference from both the CMB and SCWRA.

Religious instruction is not mandatory in public schools. State education is separate from religion, but there is no restriction on teaching religion in schools

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted some religious freedoms during the reporting period. The SCWRA continued to delay or deny registration to a number of Protestant Christian groups but registered one Baptist church whose application was previously denied or delayed.

In addition, in 2005 the Justice Ministry denied registration to a religious nongovernmental organization (NGO), the Azerbaijan Centre for Religion and Democracy. Human rights activists alleged that the ministry denied the registration of this group because of its criticism of the official religious structures and to obstruct its activities.

Unregistered religious groups continued to function, and there were fewer incidents than in previous years of official harassment, break-ups of religious services, or police intimidation and fines. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of beatings during police raids.

For example, on April 16, 2006, Baku police interrupted the Easter services of the Protestant Community of Greater Grace purportedly to ascertain the legality of the group's religious activities. However, when the group complained to the Government, local officials apologized for the incident.

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, on June 12, 2005, police raided a gathering of approximately 200 Jehovah's Witnesses in Baku, detaining 29 members of the group and then releasing them after several hours in police custody.

Authorities raided Baku's Mehebet Baptist Church summer camp in July 2005 in the town of Gakh, and in November 2005 they raided the Baptist congregation in Ali-Bayramli.

In 2004, police reportedly harassed and occasionally raided the meetings of other religious minorities including Seventh day Adventists in Ganja.

MOJ officials and police forcibly evicted the Juma Mosque community from its premises in 2004, following protracted litigation. The mosque remained closed as of the end of the reporting period.

Government officials cited the political activity of the mosque's imam, Ilgar Ibrahimoglu as one reason for seeking the eviction of the Juma Mosque community. Ibrahimoglu supported the opposition political party leader Isa Gambar's 2003 election movement, and in 2005 he campaigned on behalf of opposition party parliamentary candidates in the November parliamentary election.

Since his 2004 conviction for participating in post election demonstrations in 2003, Ibrahimoglu has not been allowed to travel outside the country, including to several meetings of the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, where he was to be an official NGO participant.

On June 30, 2005, the first anniversary of the Juma community's eviction from the mosque, police briefly detained and released Ibrahimoglu for leading a group of worshippers into the Juma Mosque to conduct prayers, although the mosque remained officially closed.

Local law enforcement authorities occasionally monitored religious services, and some observant Christians and Muslims were penalized for their religious affiliations. The law on religious freedom expressly prohibits religious proselytizing by foreigners, and this was enforced strictly. Government authorities have deported several Iranian and other foreign clerics operating independently of the organized Muslim community for alleged violations of the law. The Government was concerned about Islamic missionary groups (predominately Iranian and Wahhabis) that operated in the country, whose activities have been restricted in recent years. In May 2005 the Government closed a Saudi Arabian-sponsored Sunni mosque in the city of Sumgayit.

Various religious groups previously reported some restrictions and delays in the import of religious literature by some government ministries. However, the SCWRA

has also facilitated the import of such literature, and few religious groups reported difficulty importing literature through the SCWRA.

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 in order to go abroad for religious studies.

No religious identification is required in passports or other identity documents. In 1999 a court decided in favor of a group of Muslim women who sued for the right to wear headscarves in passport photos; however, the Center for Protection of Conscience and Religious Persuasion Freedom (DEVAMM) reported that authorities prohibited Muslim women from wearing headscarves in passport photos. In 2004 a group of women appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to protest the ban.

Some local officials continued to discourage Muslim women from wearing headscarves in schools. However, in June 2005, a court in Sumgayit upheld a school teacher's right to wear a headscarf while teaching and ordered the school to pay her back wages for the two months she was not allowed to teach.

Following months of repeated refusals, local officials in the Zaqatala region finally issued a birth certificate to Baptist parents who wished to give their son a Christian name. Members of the ethnic Georgian minority reported that difficulty in registering children with non-Azeri names was particularly acute in this region.

On April 28, 2006, police arrested Mushfiq Mammedov, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, for refusing to fulfill the country's mandatory military service requirement, due to his religious beliefs. Mammedov appealed his arrest in court on grounds that he had a constitutional right to alternative military service as a conscientious objector. Mammedov remained in pretrial detention. In a previous case, the Supreme Court ruled that a member of a religious minority must fulfill compulsory military service despite his constitutional entitlement to alternative military service because of his religious beliefs. After seven months of litigation in the lower courts, the Supreme Court held that while the country remained in a "state of war" with Armenia, the military's service requirement superseded the individual's alternative service right. The court further agreed with the military's argument that absent implementing regulations, the military was not obligated to provide any alternative service option. The individual and his family subsequently left the country.

The Baptist community reported that the authorities have not returned a building of historic significance previously confiscated under the Soviet regime that is used as a central Baku cinema. The Baha'i community reported that the Government has not responded to its August 2005 request that the authorities return a Baku house of historic value to the community. The Government claimed that the country does not have a law on the restitution of seized property, rendering it impossible to return the buildings.

Press reports indicate that in the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, a predominantly ethnic Armenian area over which the authorities have no control, the Armenian Apostolic Church enjoys a special status. The largely Muslim ethnic Azeri population in Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven occupied territories, which fled the region during the conflict with Armenia in the 1990s, was not able to return to these areas.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials continued. In many instances, abuses reflected the popular antipathy towards ethnic Azeri converts to non-Russian Orthodox Christianity and other nontraditional religious groups.

In March 2005 the head of the CMB appeared in a television expose describing nontraditional religious groups as subversive sects. The chairman of the SCWRA spoke on television claiming that Adventists used financial bribes to recruit new adherents. On June 21, 2006, a representative of the SCWRA criticized Adventists and other nontraditional religious groups in an expose aired on a leading television channel. In the same broadcast representatives of the Ganja orthodox church described nontraditional religious groups as "brainwashing" their members.

Nontraditional religious groups faced particularly acute problems operating in remote regions of the country, including the exclave of Nakhchivan. For example, in December 2004 the leader of the small Baha'i community in Nakhchivan was briefly detained and released, reportedly because of his religious activity and teachings.

Government authorities took various actions to restrict what they claimed were political and terrorist activities by Iranian and other clerics operating independently of the organized Muslim community. The Government outlawed several Islamic humanitarian organizations because of credible reports about connections to terrorist activities. The Government also deported foreign Muslim clerics it suspected of engaging in political activities. There also were reports that the Government harassed

Muslim groups due to security concerns. For example, the Human Rights Resource Center in Khachmaz reported that Wahhabis in Khachmaz were harassed because the authorities suspect that all Wahhabists have links to terrorism. On April 18, 2006, the authorities announced the conviction of a Wahabbist group called the Jammat-al-Mujahiddin on charges of plotting terrorist actions.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country. Sunni Imam Kazim Aliyev, who appealed his 2002 arrest in Ganja to the ECHR, was released from prison in January 2006 by presidential pardon. In the northern city of Khachmaz, community members reported that on several occasions, police harassed and detained some Muslims who had disrupted public order. The police allegedly shaved the detainee's' beards; however, police officials denied detaining anyone for religious reasons.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

Some religious groups in the country report improvements in their ability to function freely. Several churches indicated that they either received or expected to receive their registration, they were able to import religious literature, and they met without government interference.

When minority religious communities outside of Baku reported that local authorities illegally denied their registration, the SCWRA intervened on their behalf and rectified the situation. In previous years, the SCWRA had taken a particularly strict approach to the registration of minority religious communities and had failed to prevent local authorities from banning such communities.

During the reporting period, the Government worked actively to promote interfaith understanding. SCWRA convened leaders of various religious communities on several occasions to resolve disputes in private, and has provided forums for visiting officials to discuss religious issues with religious figures. During the reporting period the SCWRA organized several seminars, conferences, and regional meetings on religious freedom and tolerance.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is popular prejudice against Muslims who convert to non-Islamic faiths and hostility towards groups that proselytize, particularly evangelical Christian and missionary groups. This has been accentuated by the unresolved conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh.

As in previous reporting periods, newspapers and television broadcasts depicted small, vulnerable religious groups as a threat to the identity of the nation and undermining the country's traditions of interfaith harmony, which led to local harassment. In addition, the head of the SCWRA has made remarks at times during these broadcasts, which contributed to the climate of hostility these broadcasts generate.

During the reporting period, articles critical of Wahhabism and Christian missionaries appeared in many newspapers and one television channel aired "exposes" of Christian church services. Religious proselytizing by foreigners is against the law, and there is vocal opposition to it.

Hostility also existed toward foreign (mostly Iranian and Wahhabist) Muslim missionary activity, which was viewed in part as seeking to spread political Islam, and therefore as a threat to stability and peace. The media targeted some Muslim communities that the Government claimed were involved in illegal activities.

Hostility between Armenians and Azeris, intensified by the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, remained strong. In those areas of the country controlled by Armenians, all ethnic Azeris have fled, and the mosques that have not been destroyed are not functioning. Animosity toward ethnic Armenians elsewhere in the country forced most of them to depart between 1988 and 1990, and all Armenian churches, many of which were damaged in ethnic riots that took place more than a decade ago, remained closed. As a consequence, the estimated ten thousand to thirty thousand ethnic Armenians who remained were unable to attend services in their traditional places of worship.

There were few cases of prejudice and discrimination against Jews in the country, and in the few instances of anti-Semitic activity, the Government was quick to respond. Jewish community leaders consistently remarked on the positive relationship they have with the Government and leaders of other religious communities. In 2004, a new Jewish community center was opened in Baku with high-level government

participation. Authorities also reserved one wing of a Baku school for secular and religious classes for 200 Jewish students.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the reporting period, embassy officers conveyed U.S. concerns about the registration process and the overall attitude towards nontraditional religious groups to the chairman of the SCWRA. Embassy officers also expressed concerns about the Government's commitment to religious freedom with other members of the Government and publicly in the press. The U.S. embassy repeatedly conveyed objections to the censorship of religious literature, and concern that proposed amendments to the law on religious freedom respect the rights of religious believers.

The ambassador and embassy officers maintain close contacts with leading Muslim, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish religious officials, and regularly meet with members of nonofficial religious groups in order to monitor religious freedom. The ambassador and embassy officers also maintain close contact with NGOs that address issues of religious freedom.

BELARUS

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricted this right in practice.

Respect for religious freedom continued to be uneven during the period covered by this report, although some improvements occurred. The Government continued to restrict religious freedom in accordance with the provisions of a 2002 law on religion and a 2003 concordat with the Belarusian Orthodox Church (BOC), 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. Authorities imprisoned a clergyman and a lay activist and 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. Protestants in particular attracted negative attention, presumably for their perceived links with the United States. A 2002 law requiring all religious groups to reregister continued to cause problems for some minority religious groups that the authorities refused to reregister. Nevertheless, the situation improved somewhat during the period covered by this report for a few minority religious groups, including Roman Catholics.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups and a widely held ethic of tolerance in society contributed to religious freedom; however, several acts of vandalism of religious sites and memorials occurred during the period covered by this report. Additionally, hostile or intolerant attitudes in some parts of the press encouraged negative attitudes toward some minority religious groups. However, the BOC took some steps to counter propaganda that discriminated against other religious groups.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights; however, officials turned down requests by U.S. Government representatives to discuss religious issues.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 80,154 square miles and a population of 9,750,200.

The country historically 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. According to polls, approximately 50 percent of Belarusians considered themselves religious. The Government claimed that of all persons who profess a religious faith, approximately 80 percent belonged to the BOC, 14 percent were either practicing Roman Catholics or identified themselves with the Roman Catholic Church, 4 percent were members of eastern religious groups, including Hare Krishnas, Muslims and Baha'i, and 2 percent were Protestant. Government census polling placed the Jewish community at 0.4 percent of the population (approximately forty thousand persons), but Jewish groups claimed that between fifty thousand and seventy thousand persons identified themselves as Jewish. There were also adherents of the Greek Catholic Church and of Orthodox religions other than the BOC. Minority religious groups included Hare

Krishnas, Hindus, Baha'is, Seventh-day Adventists, Old Believers, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Apostolic Christians, Calvinists, and Lutherans.

According to the Committee of Religious and Nationality Affairs (CRNA), as of January 1, 2006, there were 3,030 religious organizations, including 2,886 registered religious communities, 144 confessional organizations (monasteries, brotherhoods, missionairies, etc.), and 25 religious confessions and denominations. This included 1,349 Belarusian Orthodox parishes; 972 Protestant, 438 Roman Catholic, 45 Jewish, 24 Muslim, and 33 Old Believer, 13 Greek Catholic, 5 Hare Krishnas, and 5 Baha'i communities; and one Armenian Apostolic and one Latin Catholic Church. Exact numbers for registered evangelical Christian, Baptist, and Seventh-day Adventist communities were not available.

The country was designated an Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1989, creating the BOC under Patriarchal Exarch Metropolitan Filaret. The number of parishes throughout the country was approximately 1,349 at the end of the period covered by this report. Other Orthodox confessions also existed but suffered strong discrimination. Unable to register without the consent of the BOC, they were effectively banned. These included the Belarusian Autonomous Orthodox Church (BAOC), the Catacomb Orthodox Church, the True Orthodox Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

There were 438 Roman Catholic parishes, and the Church's situation has improved in recent years. On February 8, 2005, President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Cardinal Swiatek met and committed themselves to improving the relationship between the Government and the Catholic Church. After a second meeting in December 2005, Lukashenko acknowledged the significant role of the Catholic Church in the country and vowed to support it.

There were approximately 120 thousand citizens who identified themselves as Jewish near the end of the Soviet period in 1989, compared to between 40 thousand and 70 thousand at the end of the period covered by this report. At least half of the present Jewish population was thought to live in or near Minsk. The vast majority of the Jewish population was not religiously active. Of those Jews who were religiously active, most were believed to be either Reform or Conservative. There were also small but active Chabad Lubavitch communities.

Protestant groups, while relatively few in number, continued to increase. Since 1990, the number of Protestant congregations, registered and unregistered, more than doubled. The two largest Protestant groups were registered under separate Pentecostal and Baptist unions.

There were a number of congregations of the Greek Catholic Church, which once comprised approximately three quarters of the population but suffered severe persecution under tsarist and Soviet rule. Following the 1991 reestablishment of independence, the attempt to revive the Church, which maintains Orthodox rituals but is in communion with the Vatican, has had only limited success due to determined opposition by the BOC.

The Belarusian Muslim Religious Association was the main organizational body of the estimated thirty thousand Muslims in the country. The Spiritual Board of Muslims, which split from the association in 2002, claimed an estimated 200 members. Some members of a community of approximately ten thousand ethnic Tatars, with roots dating back to the eleventh century, practiced Sunni Islam.

Foreign missionaries and clergy representing western and eastern religious groups operated in the country, but lack of standardized guidance for government officials on how to properly implement recent changes in the visa laws resulted in officials issuing visas based on their discretion, rather than on uniform regulations.

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 reaffirms the equality of religions and denominations before the law, it also contains restrictive language that stipulates that cooperation between the state and religious organizations "is regulated with regard for their influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and state traditions of the Belarusian people." The CRNA regulates all religious matters in the country.

In 2002, President Lukashenko signed a religion law, 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" in society. However, key omissions indicate present interests influenced the list. The "traditional faiths" mentioned by the law do not include religious groups such as the Priestless Old Believers and Calvinist churches that have historical roots in the country dating to the seventeenth century.

Despite the law's stated intention to guarantee 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 register and establishes complex registration requirements that some religious communities, both traditional and nontraditional, have difficulty fulfilling. The law also required all previously registered groups to reregister by November 17, 2004, and bans all religious activity by unregistered religious groups.

Domestic religious groups continued to call for revocation of at least part of the 2002 law. In 2004, Protestant groups sent petitions to President Lukashenko, the National Assembly, the council of ministers, and the constitutional court calling for revision of the most restrictive elements of the law. They declared that the law was inconsistent with the constitution and international standards. They criticized parts restricting activity to the area where a group was registered, the difficulty of obtaining permission to worship in a public place, and the preamble identifying the BOC as having a defining role and influence in the country. The authorities provided ambiguous replies to these petitions but did not revise the law.

The 2002 law established three tiers of religious groups: Religious communities, religious associations, and republican religious associations. Religious communities, or local individual religious organizations, must include at least twenty persons over the age of eighteen who live in neighboring areas. Religious associations must include at least ten communities, one of which must have been active in the country for at least twenty years, and may be constituted only by a republican (national level) religious association. Republican religious associations are formed only when there are active religious communities in the majority of the country's six regions. All applications to establish associations and republican associations must be submitted to the CRNA.

The CRNA allowed reregistration of some religious associations that existed before the 2002 law was passed but that could not meet the twenty-year rule. To register, associations must provide a list of members of the managing body with biographical information, proof of permission for the association to be at its designated location, and minutes from its founding congress. By law, associations have the exclusive right to establish religious educational institutions, invite foreigners to work with religious groups, and organize cloistered and monastic communities.

Previously registered religious communities were able to reregister with the former minimum requirement of ten members, instead of the twenty stipulated in the 2002 law. To register, a community must submit a list of founders' names, places of residence, citizenship, signatures, copies of its founding statutes, minutes of its founding meeting, and permission confirming the community's right to occupy or use any property indicated in its founding statutes. For those communities practicing religions not previously known to the Government, information about their faith must also be submitted. The regional executive committees (for those groups outside of Minsk) or the Minsk City Executive Committee handle all applications from religious communities.

While the law denies communities the right to establish institutions to train religious clergy, it permits them to operate Sunday schools. Furthermore, authorities generally accommodate members with special requirements for observing holy days.

On December 1, 2005, the president issued an edict exempting all registered religious groups from taxes on land allotted for buildings and property used for worship.

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 formulation of spiritual, cultural, and national traditions of the Belarusian people." The concordat calls for the Government and the BOC to cooperate in implementing policy in various fields, including education, development and protection of cultural legacies, and security. Although it states that the agreement 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." Despite a series of cooperation agreements signed over the past few years by the BOC and various government

ministries, BOC involvement in state institutions was reportedly minimal. Nevertheless, in 2004 President Lukashenko emphasized the continued importance of the BOC: "I very much want the Orthodox Church to stay within the framework of our state. I want the Orthodox Church to be an institution of our state and one of its main supporters."

In 2004 the National Intellectual Property Center granted the BOC the exclusive right to use the word "Orthodox" in its title and to use the image of the Cross of Euphrosynia, the patroness saint of the country, as its symbol. These moves were seen as further actions to solidify the standing of the BOC as the only permitted Orthodox faith.

The Government refers to groups that it does not consider to be traditional religious groups as "nontraditional," and government officials and state media also widely use the term "sect" when referring to nontraditional religious groups, although it is not an official designation.

Western and Orthodox Easter and Christmas are all national holidays; however they do not appear to negatively impact any religious groups.

In 2004 the CRNA reported that of the 2,780 religious communities subject to the reregistration requirement, 2,676 had successfully reregistered. Of the 140 religious associations and republican religious associations required to reregister, 128 had done so. The CRNA stated that the twelve religious associations not reregistered self-liquidated for lack of members and activity. Of the 104 religious communities not reregistered, 83 self-liquidated. Several religious groups reported that the CRNA offered significant assistance throughout the process. The remaining twenty "did not manage to complete reregistration due to irregularities of critical importance," according to the CRNA. The twenty denied reregistration were all religious groups the Government considered "nontraditional."

Contrary to the expectations of many, the CRNA reported that regional executive committees and the Minsk executive committee reregistered 99.3 percent of those religious communities that did not self-liquidate, and the Government did not use reregistration for massive religious repression as had been expected. Even so, reregistration alone did not guarantee religious freedom, and the CRNA continued to deny reregistration to certain groups. The reasons for denial were based on the law, but its apparently arbitrary application resulted in the restriction of religious freedom.

On September 21, 2005, Minsk city court judge Alla Karpikova annulled the registration of the Belarusian Evangelical Church's only community in the country for lack of a legal address and for having less than the mandatory twenty members necessary for registration. Pastor Ernest Sabilo appealed the decision and refused to take steps to close the church, including paying the necessary legal fees for its closing. In addition on August 22, 2005, and June 27, 2006, the Minsk City Court deregistered the Belarusian Evangelical Reformed Union Church and Christ's Covenant Reformed Baptist Church, respectively, for lack of legal addresses.

On November 9, 2005, authorities refused to register a Russian Orthodox Church Abroad village parish after its recent conflict with the local Moscow patriarchate diocese. Orthodox communities not based in Moscow can receive state registration only with the approval of the local Moscow patriarchate bishop, who told the village parish to worship instead at the local Moscow patriarchate church. The village parish refused and in 2005 was fined for conducting worship in private homes.

In 2004 the Jewish human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry (UCSJ) was denied reregistration for submitting some documents late. UCSJ appealed the denial to the Supreme Court, but for technical reasons the Court declined to take the case. This left UCSJ with no option but to close. However, government actions prevented UCSJ from being able to do so. Following the reregistration denial, the authorities blocked UCSJ's bank account, preventing the organization from paying its lease and taxes or providing severance pay to employees. In mid-June 2005 UCSJ was able to access its bank accounts and pay its rent and salaries. UCSJ did not reapply for registration following its closure and remained unregistered at the end of the period covered by this report.

Under regulations issued in 2001, the Government requires an organization inviting foreign clergy to make a written request to CRNA, including the dates and reason for the visit. Even if the visit is for nonreligious purposes such as charitable activities, representatives must obtain a visa and permission from the CRNA. The CRNA has twenty days in which to respond, and there is no provision for appeal of its decision. Legislation prohibits "subversive activities" by foreign organizations and prohibits the establishment of offices of foreign organizations whose activities incite "national, religious, and racial enmity" or could "have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the people."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Religious freedom was restricted both actively and passively by the Government. The Government passed laws that limit freedom of worship, speech, and assembly. The Government also failed to regularly condemn acts of religious insensitivity or intolerance. Some of the 2,886 registered religious communities were registered only on a local basis, which provided limited rights. With or without official registration, some religious groups encountered difficulty renting or purchasing property to establish places of worship, building churches (e.g., the Greek Catholics and Protestant groups), or openly training clergy.

Many religious groups encountered problems converting 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 other nontraditional groups were caught in a closed loop: Denied permission to convert their properties for religious uses because they were not registered religious groups, 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.

The New Life Church in Minsk, a member of the Union of Full Gospel Churches, faced closure because authorities refused to register the congregation at the cow barn it owned and wisheed to use for worship. Known as the "cowshed church," the New Life Church bought the barn and surrounding property four years ago. The church began to meet there after being denied permission to rent elsewhere. Local authorities, however, refused to allow New Life to convert the building, change how the cowshed was registered, or allow the church to meet in the building as is. Therefore, the church had no legal place to worship and no place to register, making all its activities illegal. The pastor and other leaders received large fines for holding illegal services, technically violating laws on assembly. At the same time, authorities permitted a BOC community to meet without hindrance in a converted railcar less than a mile away.

On August 30, 2005, authorities ordered the New Life Church to vacate the barn and sell it to the local government. New Life appealed the decision, but the courts rejected the appeal and issued the church two more official warnings. On November 17, 2005, New Life filed its third application for registration at the address of the former cow barn using a new "technical passport" (registration document) that it received from local authorities reclassifying the cow barn as a "building specializing in religious purposes." One week later, however, local authorities rejected New Life's application, annulled the new passport, and subsequently fired the employee who issued it to New Life "for issuing the passport illegally." On June 22, 2006, the New Life Church appealed the city authorities' case to force the sale of its cow barn. At the end of the period covered by this report, the case was pending.

The one thousand-member Minsk Community of Krishna Consciousness (the Hare Krishnas) also faced closure for meeting at, and attempting to register, a property it already owned. Local authorities refused to register the Hare Krishnas at a building they purchased in 1990 and had used as a place of worship since that time, claiming the building was zoned only for residential use. Since 2004 the Hare Krishnas had received six warnings from local authorities for meeting at a building where it was not registered. The Minsk community appealed to the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), thus hindering the local government's ability to close the community. In August 2005 UNCHR recommended that the authorities "restore rights" to the community within ninety days. At the end of the period covered by this report, the authorities had not complied with UNCHR's recommendation.

Although the New Generation Church in Baranovichi managed to reregister, it experienced problems finding a place to worship, according to the Forum 18 online news source. In 1997 the church bought a warehouse to turn into a church, but the authorities refused to allow it to convert the building, change how the warehouse was registered, or give the church the rights to the land under the building.

During the period covered by this report, many traditional and nontraditional religious groups continued to experience problems obtaining property or registering property they already own, due to apparent government efforts to restrict the ability of these groups to establish houses of worship.

The Minsk Community of Krishna Consciousness found several legal addresses to rent, but the landlords rescinded their offers after they were pressured by authorities. The community found another legal address and submitted the registration documents, but the authorities denied registration.

The Protestant Light to the World Church, which reregistered in 2004, continued to experience difficulty finding a state-approved nonresidential place to worship. It

had lost its premises four times since 2002. After its lease expired in October 2005, the church rented a room in another office building. A few days later the owner annulled the lease due to pressure from the authorities.

A government decree specifies measures to ensure public order and safety during general public gatherings. Some meeting hall officials have cited the decree as a basis for canceling or refusing to extend agreements with religious groups for the use of their facilities. During the period covered by this report, it was practically impossible for a religious group to rent and meet in a public facility.

On March 31, 2006, the Minsk city administration refused to allow the local Hassidic Jewish community to hold its Passover celebration at the state-owned Palace for Children and Youth, according to Forum 18. The administration claimed that a religious event could not be allowed at a venue frequented by children. The community was forced to hold the celebration at its cafeteria, which could only accommodate approximately 10 percent of the invited guests.

According to Forum 18, in 2004 Minsk authorities rejected a request by the Calvinist Reformed Church to conduct an international conference devoted to the 450th anniversary of the Church's founding in the country. Officials reportedly informed the Church that it had no right to conduct an international conference, since the organization was not registered as a republican religious association, despite the fact that the religion law allows religious organizations to invite foreigners to participate in meetings, pilgrimages, and other activities.

During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of fines on Protestant groups for failure to pay taxes on the assistance provided to destitute families and individuals.

During the period covered by this report, the Government monitored peaceful minority religious groups, with particular attention to those that could be perceived as "foreign" or "cults." On June 27, 2005, the chairman of the Gomel regional CRNA informed the press that district authorities had formed commissions to monitor religious communities. The commissions, made up of local executive government, law enforcement, tax officials, and public representatives, were to enforce laws on religion, assist traditional denominations, and counter illegal missionary activity. The primary objective was to ensure that all denominations, including the BOC, followed the laws on religion.

According to online news source Interfax, the Iosif Volotski Orthodox Center had been gathering information for the past five years on various "sects" operating in the country. The center had a library of sect literature, recordings of sermons, a collection of films on sects, and a list of mass media that regularly disseminated sect literature.

According to Forum 18, in 2003 Vladimir Lameko, vice chairman of CRNA, ordered local officials to increase monitoring of religious organizations, carry out regular visits during worship services and meetings with religious leaders, and conduct regular checks on unregistered religious groups with the aim of terminating their activities. Lameko cited "crude violations" of the law in Nesvizh "predominantly by Protestant communities" and the need to improve local officials' ability to "regulate the ethnic-confessional situation." In addition, Lameko ordered local officials to prevent the country's main Polish minority organization from using property owned by the Catholic Church. He also ordered officials to conduct "systematic work" with local Catholic leaders to ensure that foreign Catholic religious workers used Belarusian or Russian in their sermons. Following Lameko's order, representatives from the Union Evangelical Faith Christians and Baptist communities reported that teachers questioned children who belonged to these churches about their attendance at religious ceremonies to determine which students were attending Protestant ceremonies. During the period covered by this report, this questioning reportedly continued, although to a lesser degree.

In 2004 President Lukashenko made a statement that encouraged protection of the status quo against "foreign" religions: "Some members of the opposition, instigated by foreign minions, make provocative suggestions about narrowing the sphere of activities of traditional religions, primarily the Orthodox Church, for the benefit of various sects and religions that are nontraditional in this country."

Forum 18 reported that on May 19, 2006, authorities pressured Pentecostal pastor Oksana Gavrilenko to resign from her job as a school teacher after she complained about a lecture given to students by an Orthodox priest on the dangers of "sects," including Baptists and Pentecostals. According to the report, authorities did not reinstate Gavrilenko but asked the priest to refrain from slandering Protestant churches.

During the period covered by this report, the Government took steps to advise the public on new religious groups that might be perceived as "foreign" or "cults" and discouraged their growth. On November 9, 2005, CRNA chairman Stanislav Buko

announced that authorities would not register destructive religious sects banned by law. He affirmed there were no such sects operating in the country during the period covered by this report, but persons who were participating in activities possessing characteristics of such sects were closely monitored. This announcement followed a November 3, 2005, meeting between the BOC, the Ministry of Education, and the CRNA to discuss safeguarding youth against the influence of "those destructive pseudo-religions." In March 2005 Vladimir Makarov, chief of the Defense Ministry's Information Directorate, called on Belarusian Orthodox clergy to fight the spread of "destructive sects" and to spread Orthodoxy.

On May 20, 2005, authorities claimed that the number of sects and separatists was decreasing as citizens lost interest in nontraditional faiths. Authorities, including law enforcement bodies, took measures to prevent the spread of the many "destructive cults" that began work in the country from 1992 to 1996. The Ministry of Justice outlawed twenty-four religious organizations operating under the status of public associations, but groups such as the Moon Church and Scientologists were still functioning in the country. Authorities claimed these groups, especially the Scientologists, spread religious propaganda via workshops and lectures, used manipulative methods similar to those employed by psychotherapists and psychiatrists, and were to be regarded as "commercial" cults or profit-driven marketing systems.

Citizens theoretically are not prohibited from proselytizing and may speak freely about their religious beliefs; however, authorities often interfered with or punished individuals who proselytized on behalf of some registered and unregistered religious groups. Authorities regulated every aspect of proselytizing and literature distribution: Who may participate, what may be done, when groups may participate, and where groups may be active. The Government continued to enforce a 1995 Council of Ministers decree that regulates the activities of religious workers, as well as a 1997 council of ministers directive that permits the teaching of religion at youth camps held by registered religious groups.

Authorities previously harassed, fined, and detained Hare Krishnas for illegally distributing religious literature. Since Minsk city authorities repeatedly denied requests by Hare Krishnas for permission to distribute religious materials in the city, the group decided to stop distribution during the period covered by this report. On November 15, 2005, authorities seized religious literature, including copies of the New Testament, from a street library run by unregistered Council of Churches Baptists in Bobruisk.

Foreign missionaries are not permitted to engage in religious activities outside of the institutions that invited them. The law requires one-year, multiple-entry "spiritual activities" visas for foreign missionaries. Religious workers continued to experience difficulties in obtaining visas, even those that had a long history in the country. Often, even missionaries operating legitimately with a missionary visa experienced harassment from authorities, particularly if they came from the West. Observers expressed concern that lack of standardized government guidance for officials on how to properly implement recent changes to visa laws could affect the ability of these missionaries to be present and work in the country.

Although there were no reports of visa denials or revocations for western missionaries, authorities reportedly made some wait until the last minute for their visa renewals or forced them to incur the additional expense of going to Lithuania for short-term visas while waiting for their missionary visa renewals. At least one Protestant missionary and the local citizens who worked with him were repeatedly summoned and questioned about the sources and use of his funding, despite the fact that he had been in the country for more than five years and had not been charged with visa violations or other legal problems.

Approval for visits by foreign religious workers often involves a lengthy bureaucratic process. Internal affairs agencies may compel the departure of foreign clergymen by not extending their registrations or by denying them temporary stay permits. These authorities may make decisions on expulsion on their own or based on recommendations from religious affairs councils, regional executive committees, or the religious affairs department of the executive committee of the city of Minsk.

On December 22, 2005, authorities refused to renew the visas of two Catholic priests from Poland and demanded that they leave the country. Father Robert Krzywicki, who had worked in Borisov for more than ten years, was expelled for participation in "nonreligious" activities. Appeals to CRNA resulted in a statement from the agency head that the Catholic Church assigns priests to parishes and the "state does not interfere in the activity of religious organizations."

An article in a 2004 issue of Znamya Novosti stated that the Unification Church, the "Church of Christ," and the Church of Scientology were among the most dangerous "sects" in the country. A 2004 article in the state-owned newspaper Minski Kurie criticized adherents of the Unification Church and Hare Krishnas. The article

claimed that in 1997 Hare Krishnas were designated a "destructive totalitarian sect." According to a representative of the Hare Krishna community, authorities never made such a designation. After being confronted by the Hare Krishnas, the journalist responsible for the article admitted that this false information was provided by the State Committee for Security (BKGB), which the BKGB later confirmed.

The Ministry of Education continued to use the textbook Man, Society, and State, which labels Protestants and Hare Krishnas as "sects," even after the protests of religious groups. After conducting an examination of the book, the CRNA and the Ministry of Education stated that the word "sect" was a "scientific" word and did not label Hare Krishnas or Protestants as antisocial.

Leaders of Protestant communities criticized language in the textbook Basics on Home and Personal Security as deliberately discriminatory against Protestants, particularly the chapter entitled "Beware of the Sects." The chapter includes a paragraph informing students of such "sects" as Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Maria, White Brotherhood, and the Jehovah's Witnesses. In January 2005 Protestant leaders sent a letter of protest to the president, national assembly leaders, the CRNA, and the Ministry of Education. The CRNA reviewed the request and declared the section did not infringe upon the rights of Protestants.

While the Government took no visible steps to stop the sale of xenophobic literature at Pravoslavnaya Kniga or other locations, it condemned an independent newspaper for reprinting cartoons depicting the prophet of Islam that originally appeared in a Danish newspaper in 2005. The Government used this incident as grounds on which to close the opposition newspaper and to launch criminal charges against its editor.

In 2004 BOC clergy reportedly made several anti-Catholic statements during a nationally televised religious ceremony marking Orthodox Easter. The Roman Catholic Church also expressed concern about the sale of anti-Catholic literature at events and stores linked with the BOC.

Limited restitution of religious property occurred during the period covered by this report. There was no legal basis for restitution of property that was seized during the Soviet and Nazi occupations, and the law restricts the restitution of property being used for cultural or educational purposes. Furthermore, the Government did not return buildings if it had nowhere to move the current occupants. Many former synagogues in Minsk were used as theaters, museums, sports complexes, and a beer hall; most of the Jewish community's requests to have these synagogues returned were refused. During the period covered by this report, Jewish communities did not request the return of buildings or other real estate. Jewish communities sought the return of Jewish cultural artifacts, books, and particularly Torahs from museums but did not receive any items. Some officials privately expressed to Jewish leaders that they shared their concern and supported the initiative.

A Catholic community requested the return of a centuries-old church and monastery in central Minsk. The building housed the state archives. The Government expressed its willingness to return the church and monastery, but only after a suitable new place and funds for moving the archives were found; according to independent news source Belapan, CRNA chairman Leonid Gulyako told the church members in February 2006 that since the Government did not have funds to construct new buildings to house the archives, the church and monastery could not be handed back to its members. In Grodno, authorities returned fourteen monastery buildings to the Roman Catholic Church.

In 2004, by order of the Ministry of Education, Belarusian State University (BSU) closed the International Humanities Institute, which had been an independent educational entity affiliated with BSU and the only higher educational organization offering Judaica studies. The Judaica program continued to exist as an autonomous institute in BSU's curriculum until it was absorbed by the International Relations Department in September 2005.

The CRNA reported that it regularly responded to all public expressions of xenophobia by notifying government agencies responsible for pursuing legal action against the perpetrators; however, no known prosecutions or convictions occurred during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government frequently abused the religious freedom of several religious groups.

Some abuses of freedom of religion arose from broader laws that circumscribe basic freedoms. The CRNA defended the Government's past measures against religious groups in its response to the U.S. State Department's 2005 International Reli-

gious Freedom Report: "Sanctions against representatives of religious associations are applied for breaching the law and are not aimed at limiting religious freedom."

The most common charge against religious leaders was organizing or hosting an unauthorized meeting, a charge that arises from a law circumscribing freedom of assembly. According to Forum 18, however, for the first time in twenty years, authorities imprisoned a person for holding religious worship. On March 3, 2006, a Minsk district judge sentenced the pastor of Christ's Covenant Reformed Baptist Church Gregory Vyazorsky to ten days in jail for having held unsanctioned services on February 5, 2006. On November 25, 2005, authorities had issued a warning to him for allegedly conducting illegal worship in a private Minsk residence. In addition the church received three warnings for failing to register a "legal address." Pentecostal bishop Sergei Tsvor faced similar charges, but according to the pastor, the charges were dropped due to technical errors made by the police when filing them.

On March 24, 2006, authorities sentenced human rights lawyer Sergey Shavtsov to ten days in prison for conducting an unsanctioned interdenominational seminar in a private café. On the last day of the three-day seminar, police stormed the café and detained him because the event allegedly violated the law.

According to Forum 18, in June 2005 authorities warned Russian Orthodox Church Abroad priest Leonid Plyats that he would receive jail time or a heavy fine if he conducted "illegal religious activity." Since the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad was not registered, any activity other than a small gathering in a home would be construed as "illegal religious activity."

Protestant and non-BOC Orthodox religious communities were fined for illegally conducting and hosting religious services and carrying out unsanctioned religious activities. According to the CRNA, convictions for such offenses were based on charges of either disturbing public order or illegally gathering without prior permission. The law allows 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.

Forum 18 reported that on June 1, 2006, authorities warned three evangelical Christians for participating in a twenty-four-hour vigil of silently reading a Bible in Brest's central square to express solidarity with victims of political repression in the country. According to the authorities, the three protesters needed prior permission from the authorities for organizing and conducting religious events outside of designated worship areas.

On May 19, 2006, local authorities fined Protestant pastor Illya Radkevich $70 (150 thousand Belarusian rubles) for failing to register his Full Gospel Christian community and leading an unsanctioned religious service.

On April 6, 2006, authorities fined political opposition activist Boris Khamaida $2,600 (5.6 million Belarusian rubles) for demonstrating with a sign that contained the Gospel of Matthew quotation, "The one who endures to the end will be saved." Police had detained Khamaida for three hours on March 20, 2006, for displaying the sign and accused him of breaking demonstration laws.

According to Forum 18, authorities repeatedly fined members of a Baptist family for conducting unsanctioned religious meetings in their home. On November 21, 2005, a Bobruisk court fined pastor Yermalitsky $67 (145 thousand Belarusian rubles) for holding an unlawful religious service in his home. On November 25, 2005, however, the case was dismissed. Authorities repeatedly inspected the Yermalitsky home or summoned Yermalitsky to the local executive committee offices and reportedly warned him of serious consequences if he and his group did not stop holding such meetings. On December 12, 2005, Yermalitsky was fined $13 (28 thousand Belarusian rubles) for remodeling his home to be used as a place of worship without prior government approval. On December 27, 2005, authorities fined Yermalitsky's wife $270 (580 thousand Belarusian rubles) for hosting an unsanctioned religious gathering.

Between December 2004 and the end of the reporting period, authorities charged New Life Church administrator Vasily Yurevich with holding unsanctioned religious services three times and fined him a total of approximately $5,800 (12.5 million Belarusian rubles). On March 22, 2005, the court fined New Life Church's pastor, Vyacheslav Goncharenko, $334 (714 thousand Belarusian rubles), also for allegedly hosting an unsanctioned gathering. In 2005 the Minsk executive committee issued five warnings to the church. The law requires only two warnings before a church may be closed. In addition, on June 5, 2006, authorities filed a protocol against Goncharenko for holding unsanctioned religious services in a building they deemed unsuitable for worship.

On June 9, 2005, authorities fined Council of Churches Baptist pastor Valery Ryzhuk $24 (fifty-one thousand Belarusian rubles) for leading an unlawful religious

service. When he refused to pay, two court executors seized an oil heater from his house worth twice the amount of the fine.

In the first half of 2005, authorities fined leaders of a village parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in the Brest region for organizing unsanctioned religious meetings and events in their homes. Father Ioann Grudnitsky, the head of the unregistered parish, received two fines totaling $1,835 (4.8 million Belarusian rubles). According to Forum 18, a Brest CRNA representative justified the local authorities "lawful measures to curtail the unsanctioned activities" of Grudnitsky's parish and encouraged his parishioners to attend the Moscow Patriarchate church instead where "normal conditions have been created for the performance of religious rites by all who wish." Local administrative authorities fined parishioner Liliya Yukhnovskaya $32 (seventy-two thousand Belarusian rubles) for "making her home available for an unsanctioned religious event." The Government harassed the BAOC, which has given up attempting to register.

In 2005 authorities confiscated the former Orthodox church in the town of Semkov Gorodok that the local community had repaired for the BAOC on the grounds that the reconstruction had not been authorized. Authorities stated that they intended to rebuild the church and restore it to the BOC, which they claimed was its rightful owner. The BOC reportedly planned to relocate the BOC community that had been meeting in a converted railcar. BAOC head Leonid Akalovich, who had been fined by the court for unauthorized construction as well as for leading an unregistered religious organization, was fired in the fall of 2005 under the pretext of "redundancies."

In early December 2005 police in Vitebsk raided the homes of local Muslims on the pretext of looking for suspects connected to two September bombings, even though authorities had previously arrested two brothers, who had no known connection to Islam, for the bombings. Police detained several of the Muslims for questioning and seized religious literature.

In 2004 the courts fined the pastor of the registered Light to the World Full Gospel Church for allegedly holding an unauthorized religious meeting in his home. They also fined three members of the unregistered International Union of Baptist Churches (IUBC) for an unauthorized hospital visit during a religious holiday. Earlier that year, an IUBC pastor was warned against conducting religious services in the town of Soligorsk, and his group was warned to cease all illegal religious activity.

Following government pressure and harassment of their respective religious organizations, BAOC priest Yan Spasyuk and the Light of Kaylasa leaders Sergei Akadanav and Tatyana Akadanava left the country in 2003. Several other Light of Kaylasa members also left following continued government pressure, and the group remained inactive during the reporting period.

In 2003 Yuri Denischik, a missionary of the Novogrudok Association of Baptists, was fined for illegally leading a prayer service in a private home registered to the association.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 individual instances of anti-Semitism occurred during the period covered by this report, anti-Semitism was not officially encouraged by the state. State-owned periodicals continued to attack nontraditional and Jewish religious groups. In January 2006 Mogilev newspapers wrote a series of anti-Semitic articles after a new type of kosher bread was produced in the city. The state-owned Mogilev Register claimed that the blood of sacrificed animals was used in kosher rituals and warned Orthodox believers to "keep away from kosher products in the same way they keep away from idol sacrifice." The Evening Mogilev reported that the act of making something kosher is "sacrilegious and anti-Christian."

The sale and distribution of anti-Semitic literature through state press distributors, government agencies, and stores affiliated with the BOC continued. In past years anti-Semitic literature was openly sold during several Orthodox book fairs in Minsk and at the House of Mercy, a BOC-established hospice in the capital. The Roman Catholic Church reported that anti-Catholic literature was also sold at locations linked to the BOC.

Anti-Semitic and Russian ultranationalist newspapers and literature continued to be sold at Pravoslavnaya Kniga (Orthodox Bookstore), which sells Orthodox literature and religious paraphernalia. The store was part of the company

Pravoslavnaya Initsiativa, whose general director often wrote xenophobic articles. During the period covered by this report, anti-Semitic videocassettes and DVDs were available for purchase at Pravoslavnaya Kniga. In addition, the store gave away pamphlets alleging that sacrificial blood was used in the production of kosher food. Despite a 2003 order by the prosecutor general and the Ministry of Information to remove the anti-Semitic and xenophobic newspaper Russkiy Vestnik, distribution continued. Pravoslavnaya Kniga employees stated that they were only selling off current stock and not new copies. The book, The Enemies of Russia and the Slavic World Who are against Belarus and President Lukashenko, was also for sale. This ultranationalist and xenophobic book includes a chapter by Vladimir Chertovich, general director of Pravoslavnaya Initsiativa, the Minsk-based company known for publishing hate literature directed at Jews, Muslims, and other minorities. It was published in Russia but was distributed in the country at Pravoslavnaya Kniga. According to Evangelical Bishop Ivan Pashkevich, Pravoslavnaya Initsiativa published the anti-Semitic book entitled, A Verdict to Those Killing Russia, aimed at inciting racial and ethnic hatred and discrimination based on religion.

In response to an appeal by a Jewish group to prosecute Pravoslavnaya Kniga, in 2004 the prosecutor general launched an investigation into the incident to determine whether or not Pravoslavnaya Kniga had illegally distributed literature that promoted intolerance. The general prosecutor's office then transferred the case to the Minsk city prosecutor's office. The latter declared there was no basis for a criminal case. The CRNA asserted that the publication of such literature in the country was illegal, but that nothing could be done regarding privately imported Russian publications.

On April 17, 2006, authorities issued an official warning to preschool teacher Lyudmila Izakson-Bolotovskaya for the "intentional inculcation of religious doctrines in small children." Izakson-Bolotovskaya and her children's Jewish musical group were shown on local television celebrating a Jewish holiday. Authorities claimed that she violated the law by holding a religious celebration in a government building and illegally propogated Judaism via the television coverage of the event. The authorities forced Izakson-Bolotovskaya to remove Jewish symbols from the classroom and threatened her with future prosecution if she continued these activities.

During the period covered by this report, excavation and reconstruction work was finished at the site of a 1950s sports stadium in Grodno built on the site of a former Jewish cemetery. The excavation uncovered human remains, which authorities promised to remove from the site for future reburial. Instead, photographs taken by the Jewish community revealed human remains mixed with earth in dump trucks being used to resurface a road. A 2004 visit by U.S. embassy staff found skulls and other bones scattered around the area.

After intense international pressure, regional authorities signed an agreement in 2003 with a national Jewish leader to cease excavation during construction and to rebury the uncovered remains in a different Jewish cemetery. In 2006 the Jewish community received permission from authorities to put up a plaque noting that the stadium sits on a former Jewish cemetery. Local Jewish leaders believed the situation reflected insensitivity more than anti-Semitism. The authorities were also known to have dug up portions of a veterans cemetery and an Orthodox cemetery during other construction projects.

In contrast to previous reporting periods, officials did not make public anti-Semitic statements. In December 2005 author Eduard Skobelev, who edited the presidential administration's bulletin, released his book entitled Stalin's Will with a note that the book was published with support of the presidential administration. The book contained a number of anti-Semitic statements and far-fetched accusations. In a 2003 Associated Press article, Sergei Kostyan, deputy chairman of the international affairs committee of the lower house of parliament, rejected criticism of the installation of a gas pipeline near the site of a former Jewish cemetery in Mozyr, accusing Jews of sowing "ethnic discord." During a 2003 press conference Information Minister Vladimir Rusakevich was quoted as stating that the country needed to live with Russia like brothers but to bargain with Russia "like a Yid."

Leaders in the Jewish community believed fewer cases of vandalism occurred than just a few years ago, due to international pressure as well as to stepped-up efforts by local authorities to protect religious sites. In addition, local authorities and citizens often restored damaged memorials and graves at personal expense. According to the CRNA, regional authorities nationwide continued to take measures to prevent vandalism, including erecting fences around cemeteries, conducting regular police patrols of cemeteries, and collecting and reporting incidents of vandalism.

Several Jewish religious sites, however, were vandalized during the period covered by this report. In November 2005 a Jewish cemetery in the Gomel region was vandalized and a number of gravestones broken. On August 17, 2005, vandals de-

faced the "Yama" memorial to Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust, burning plastic flowers and scattering gravestones. Authorities did not apprehend those who were responsible in either case. In 2004, vandals set fire to wreaths, scattered flowers, and damaged the Star of David at a Holocaust memorial in central Brest. The memorial had been vandalized five times since it was unveiled. Police have not fined or jailed anyone for the crimes. On April 26, 2005, vandals again damaged a memorial erected in Lida to commemorate Jews who perished there during World War II. The Jewish community did not report the act to the police, since the Lida memorial had been vandalized every spring and no one had ever been arrested. At the beginning of May 2005, unidentified vandals smashed twenty gravestones in the town of Mikashevich. Local Jews criticized police for failing to respond to the crime or arrest any suspects, pointing out that the cemetery was located just a few meters from a police station.

The Jewish community was concerned by the concept of a "greater Slavic union" popular among nationalist organizations active in the country, including the Russian National Union (RNU), which still existed despite officially dissolving in 2000, and the National Bolshevik Party, another pro-Russian Belarusian extremist organization. In 2004 RNU members in Gomel distributed anti-Semitic literature on city buses, and Jewish community centers in Gomel and Polotsk were vandalized with RNU graffiti. Investigations into these acts of vandalism did not result in the arrest of those responsible.

While the website of the Jewish Orthodox Skinheads (JOSH), an organization supposedly made up of Jewish youths to combat anti-Semitism and xenophobia, could still be accessed during the period covered by this report, it did not appear to have been updated. Despite the "organization's" stated goals, the website called upon Jews to commit provocative acts against the Government to support their cause and included language defaming non-Jewish citizens and prominent local Jewish leaders. Several Jewish leaders, all of whom considered the website to be offensive and provocative, denounced the website and expressed their concerns to authorities. The website included a link to another website purported to be run by Hare Krishna skinheads.

The official BOC prayer calendar, printed in Minsk, continued to mark May 20 as the anniversary of the 1690 death of Gavriil Belostoksky, a young child who was alleged to have been murdered by Jews near Grodno. The May 20 prayer for Belostoksky made reference to Jewish persons as "real beasts" who allegedly kidnapped and murdered Belostoksky for religious purposes. Additionally, a link on the BOC website listed Belostoksky as one of its saints and martyrs.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On December 1, 2005, the president issued an edict exempting all registered religious groups from taxes on land allotted for buildings and property used for worship.

During the reporting period, the Government funded renovations of an Orthodox monastery in Slonim and the Catholic Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral in Minsk. It also provided $14 thousand (30 million Belarusian rubles) and $258 thousand (554 million Belarusian rubles) to restore frescoes in an Orthodox church in Polotsk and in the Catholic arch-cathedral in Minsk, respectively. In May 2006, the president ruled to return a former cathedral and its property to a Roman Catholic parish in Minsk.

In December 2005 the president acknowledged the important role the Roman Catholic Church played in the country and vowed to support it.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups and a widespread ethic of tolerance in society contributed to religious freedom; however, anti-Semitism and negative attitudes toward minority religious groups persisted. In April 2006 NOVAK, an independent polling organization, conducted a poll, which included the question, "How much do you trust the state and social institutions and organizations?" According to the poll, the BOC was the most trusted institution in the country, with 70 percent of respondents expressing trust, while 45.2 percent trusted the Roman Catholic Church and 15.4 percent trusted Protestant churches. The level of distrust of Protestant churches jumped from 36 percent of respondents in 2005 to 58.5 percent, and the level of distrust of the Roman Catholic Church increased from 20 percent in 2005 to 35 percent in 2006.

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 (NKVD) to murder more than 300,000 persons in the 1930s. During the

week of November 27, 2005, approximately twelve crosses at Kurapaty were damaged. Vandals also carved a swastika into the face of an icon on a cross near the entrance. Witnesses reported that a memorial plaque disappeared and a number of photographs of victims were destroyed. Police denied vandalism had occurred and blamed the damage on the weather. On the weekend of December 3, 2005, other memorials, including the Jewish memorial stone and a Russian Orthodox icon, had red swastikas and Nazi SS symbols painted on them. In response, authorities agreed to provide round the clock surveillance for the memorial site. It was not known if the authorities did so, but the graffiti was removed.

On January 9, 2006, independent Internet news source BelaPan reported that several dozen skinheads marched through Grodno shouting obscenities and Nazi slogans and attacking pedestrians. One victim told reporters that thirty skinheads marched through the city's central square and beat him up after he tried to stop them. The marchers dispersed when police arrived. According to witnesses it was the first skinhead march Grodno had seen in five years. The authorities claimed they were not aware of any such march.

On March 15, 2005, the head of the BOC announced that it withdrew its shares from the Minsk-based publishing company, Pravoslavnaya Initsiativa, which is notorious for selling anti-Semitic literature. The church head accused the company of disseminating ideas aimed at causing rifts in society, which is inconsistent with Orthodox values. The head of the church stated that further cooperation with the publisher violated Orthodox canons and ordered all Orthodox parishes to shun its books and to refrain from interacting with the company. In addition, on June 27, 2006, the BOC informed Pravoslavnaya Initsiativa (currently "Khristianskaya Initsiativa"—Christian Initiative) that it could no longer use Orthodox symbols and language.

There was no indication that the BOC had changed its view that it would cooperate only with religious groups that had "historical roots" in the country. On September 12, 2005, the head of the BOC praised the increased cooperation between the BOC and the Roman Catholic Church and proposed that "Roman Catholics could help Orthodox Christians deal with new Western-style secularism."

On April 5, 2006, the BOC decided that political documentaries by Belarusian State Television Radio Company deputy head Yury Azaryonok should not be shown at the BOC's Easter festival. The original exhibition schedule included a meeting with Azaryonok, who is a notorious state propagandist, as well as a screening of his politicized documentaries, "The Spiritual War." However, the BOC decided that the program should be changed after it received a letter of protest from young believers who opposed showing the films because they might discredit the BOC and its leadership.

In 2004 thieves stole twelve icons and a bronze cross from a BOC church in the Brest region. Police opened an investigation. Earlier, Brest regional police and Minsk city police captured two icon thieves and recovered two of three icons they had stolen in 2001.

On September 12, 2005, police charged a man with hooliganism after he smashed two statues at the Blessed Virgin Mary Cathedral in Minsk.

In 2004 local authorities in Brest oblast refused to initiate a criminal investigation into the burglary of an evangelical Christian church in the town of Khotislav. The church had reportedly been vandalized six times prior to that incident. In 2004 the BAOC claimed that BOC clergy, accompanied by Minsk Oblast officials, visited several towns in Minsk oblast and called upon local villagers not to participate in BAOC religious services.

In 2004 the Civil Initiative for Religious Freedom published the second installment of the White Book, a collection of documents that detailed the Government's many abuses of religious freedom, information about the religion law, and copies of various reports about the religious freedom situation in the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy staff maintained regular contact with representatives of religious groups and government officials responsible for religious affairs, and met with resident and visiting U.S. citizens of various religious groups to discuss religious freedom issues in the country.

During meetings with government officials and ministers in the fall of 2005, embassy staff raised such concerns as the 2002 religion law and registration denials of certain religious communities. In 2006 embassy officials attempted to discuss subsequent religious freedom matters with the new CRNA head, Leonid Gulyako, but requests for meetings were not granted. Embassy staff also requested a separate

meeting to discuss the case of imprisoned Protestant pastor Georgy Vyazorsky, although the Government twice denied the request.

The embassy monitored the continued sale of anti-Semitic and xenophobic literature at stores and events linked with the BOC and state media distributors. During the period covered by this report, embassy staff visited the site of the Jewish cemetery in Grodno and met with local officials and community leaders to discuss the situation. Embassy staff, including the ambassador, attended several events hosted by religious groups. Embassy officials also discussed religious issues with representatives of foreign diplomatic missions in the country.

BELGIUM

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

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, the government organization mandated to act as a clearinghouse for nonrecognized religions and sectarian organizations continued to attract much attention from the groups they monitored and researched.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Some Muslim community leaders and spokespersons for nonrecognized religions cited instances of perceived discrimination by government organizations and officials. There were also isolated instances of discrimination by private individuals.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, the United States urged government officials to intensify their efforts to fight anti-Semitism and racism, and to promote religious freedom, and has cooperated with the Government on Muslim outreach programs.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 11,780 square miles and a population of approximately 10.3 million.

The population was predominantly Roman Catholic. According to the 2001 Survey and Study of Religion, jointly conducted by a number of the country's universities and based on self-identification, approximately 47 percent of the population (4.8 million persons) identified themselves as belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. This survey described the Muslim population as approximately 400,000, with an estimated 328 mosques in the country. Protestants numbered between 125,000 and 140,000. The Greek and Russian Orthodox churches had approximately 70,000 adherents. Jews numbered between 45,000 and 55,000. The Anglican Church had 10,800 members. The larger nonrecognized religions included Jehovah's Witnesses (25,000 baptized, 50,000 church goers). Estimates for other bodies included 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 Krishna, 1,500; and the Church of Scientology, 1,000.

Estimates indicated that approximately 18 percent of the population did not identify with any religion, approximately 7.4 percent of the population described itself as "secular" (members of nonconfessional philosophical organizations), and 1.1 percent belonged to organized laity that received funding for their programs.

A 2005 Free University of Brussels (ULB) document estimated that 15 percent of the Roman Catholic population attended weekly religious services, and 10 percent of the Muslim population was "practicing Muslims." However, religion continued to play a role in major life events. Within the Catholic population, 65 percent of the children born in the country were baptized, 49.2 percent of couples opted for a religious marriage, and 76.6 percent of funerals included religious services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government accords "recognized" status to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism (including evangelicals and Pentecostals), Judaism, Anglicanism, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity (Greek and Russian). Representative bodies for these religions re-

ceive 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 six recognized religions.

The federal Government and Parliament have responsibility for recognizing faiths and paying the wages and pensions of ministers of those faiths.

As a result of constitutional reforms enacted by Parliament in 2001, religious instruction, financial accountability of religious groups, and religious buildings have become the jurisdiction of the regional governments. Secular organizations remain under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities.

By law, each recognized religion has the right to provide teachers at government expense for religious instruction in public schools. The Government also pays the salaries, retirement benefits, and lodging costs of ministers and subsidizes the construction and renovation of religious buildings for recognized religions. The ecclesiastical administrations of recognized religions have legal rights and obligations, and the municipalities in which they are located must pay any debts that they incur. Some subsidies are the responsibility of the federal Government, while the regional and municipal governments pay others.

In 2006, the Government paid $104 million (82 million euros) to recognized non-Muslim religious groups, $12.7 million (10 million euros) to secular organizations, and $7.7 million (6.1 million euros) to Islamic groups. For 2005, the budgetary outlays were $101 million (79.5 million euros) for the recognized faiths, $11.8 million, (9.3 million euros) for the secular organizations and $7.6 million (6 million euros) for the Muslim faith.

The total outlays by all the governments (for faith education, and by municipal authorities for buildings) amounted to approximately $29.6 billion (23.4 billion euros).

The Government applies five criteria in deciding whether to grant recognition to a religious group: The religion must have a structure or hierarchy; the group must have a sufficient number of members; the religion must have existed in the country for a long period of time; it must offer a social value to the public; and it must abide by the laws of the state and respect public order. The five criteria are not listed in decrees or laws, and the Government does not formally define "sufficient," "long period of time," or "social value." A religious group seeking official recognition applies to the Ministry of Justice, which then conducts a thorough review before recommending approval or rejection. Final approval of recognized status is the responsibility of 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. No minority religious group attempted and failed to be registered in the last three years. In 2005, representatives from both the Armenian Church and the Buddhist faith initiated informal talks to explore the possibility of recognition. The press quoted government officials as favorable to the Buddhist application. The lack of recognized status does not prevent a religious group from practicing its faith freely and openly. Nonrecognized groups do not qualify for government subsidies; however, they may qualify for tax-exempt status as nonprofit organizations.

The Muslim faith was recognized in 1974. Since then, the Government has tried to find reliable interlocutors capable of speaking for the entire Muslim community. The Government pledged in 2004–2005 that, as soon as a new Council and Executive were formed, it could begin the process of paying approved clergy and teachers. However, at the end of the period covered by this report, regional governments were in the process of recognizing mosques eligible for funding. In October 2005, the Walloon regional government adopted a decree on recognition of mosques and local Muslim communities. A similar decree was enacted by the Flemish regional parliament in September 2005. The Flemish decree covered all recognized religions.

On October 2, 2005, the Council elected seventeen members for the Muslim Executive, which is composed of separate Francophone and Flemish wings. A Turkish-origin Muslim was elected Chairman of the Executive, and the two linguistic wings each have a vice chair. As a result of new parliamentary legislation, which provided a legal basis for a wide range of security checks, candidates for the Muslim Executive were screened, triggering some complaints within the community. An imam born and living in Antwerp was excluded from consideration for membership on the Muslim Executive based on the results of these security checks.

The transfer of power between the old and new executive caused tensions within the Muslim community. The outgoing executive refused to leave the headquarters, upon which the judicial authorities searched the premises and the two former executive chairpersons were charged with embezzlement. Once the new executive was put

in place, the authorities closed the case. Continuing internal tensions hampered the ability of the executive to finalize its proposals for official support. The executive was cooperating with government educational and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on proposals to begin training imams in the country.

In 1993, the Government established by law the Center for Equal Opportunity and the Struggle against Racism. Commonly known as the Anti-Racism Center, it is an independent agency responsible for 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 six years, but the prime minister may not remove the individual once appointed. Several NGOs, such as the Movement against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobia; the Ligue des Droits de l'Homme; Human Rights without Frontiers; and the Liga voor Mensenrechten were also active in promoting religious freedom.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Ministry of Justice and Parliament continued to research and monitor religious and quasi-religious groups that were 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 and advice to the public upon request regarding the legal rights of freedom of association, privacy, and freedom of religion. There are eight board members who are allowed to serve a renewable six-year term. The Center's library is open to the public and contains information on religion in general, as well as on specific religious groups, including information provided by those groups. The Center has the authority to share with the public any information it collects on religious sects; however, it does not have the authority to provide assessments of individual sectarian organizations to the general public. Despite its name, regulations prohibit it from categorizing any particular group as harmful. Testifying behind closed doors for the House of Representatives working group on sects, the head of the Center told House members that in 2004 the Center had received more than 500 inquiries about sectarian organizations. Seventeen percent of the queries came from public institutions. Reportedly, there were a growing number of questions (8 percent) about evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Most queries (21 percent) concerned Jehovah's Witnesses. Some inquiries (12 percent) related to faith healing. 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 December 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; the 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 twenty-seven judicial districts to monitor cases involving sects.

Regarding the Interagency Coordination Group, the parliamentary watchdog committee 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 Prosecution Office had not filed its first injunction against a "sectarian" organization. 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.

In June 2005, a Brussels appellate court judge ruled that the Church of the Kingdom of God had suffered damage by appearing in the parliamentary report of sectarian organizations. The president of the Chamber of Representatives argued that the judge's ruling undermined the legislative authority and independence of the lawmakers and filed an appeal with the country's highest court. The High Court overturned the ruling because the original court did not have the competence to rule on legislative matters.

Since 1999, the CIAOSN had conducted research on 598 organizations. In its 2006 report, the parliamentary watchdog committee mentioned an increasing number of queries about organizations originating from Northern American Protestant and African evangelical movements.

Most queries concerned Jehovah Witnesses (3.7 percent), other Protestant denominations (12.6 percent), Scientology (4.8 percent), Oriental faiths (11.2 percent), dissident Catholic organizations (5.5 percent), esoteric religions (6.6 percent), physical welfare and therapeutical organizations (11.6 percent), and New Age and New Paganism (6.6 percent).

The parliamentary committee 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, the committee also requested that brainwashing and mental manipulation be established as criminal offences.

The Council of Ministers adopted proposed draft legislation aimed at including an additional chapter in the criminal code regarding "abuse of an individual's ignorance or weakness." The key provision reads: "Anyone abusing the ignorance or weakness of a minor or a very vulnerable individual, either due to his/her age, sickness, disability, physical or mental deficiency, illegal residence or precarious living condition or pregnancy, so as to force the person to do an act or refrain from doing an act that would seriously endanger his/her physical or mental integrity, or affect his assets, will be sentenced to a prison term from three months to three years and a fine" from $318 to $25,400 (250 to 20,000 euros.).

The concept of abuse of vulnerability is not new, since the vulnerable position of the victim is an aggravating circumstance for such offences as rape, indecent assault, obscenity, human trafficking and smuggling, begging, and exploitation of slum dwellers. Similar draft legislation was submitted by members of the two houses of Parliament, but in light of the Government's own initiative, no further action on these individual initiatives was expected.

The 1998 act concerning the country's intelligence services tasked the State Security with monitoring sectarian organizations. The judicial branch of the Federal Police had a special department dealing with terrorism and harmful sects. Within this department only one person dealt with sectarian organizations. Sects were also monitored by local police forces, in particular at the level of judicial districts. Without providing specific detail, the Federal Police identified thirteen sectarian organizations that had potential for threatening public order.

According to the Federal Prosecuting Office, the 2004 criminal investigation into the Belgian Church of Scientology's operations was completed. Formal indictment and trial were scheduled for late 2006.

In 2003, the International Church of Scientology (CSI) opened its European Office for Public Affairs and Human Rights in Brussels. Press reports claimed the Church was planning to move its European Headquarters from Copenhagen to Brussels. Despite generally negative press reports and comments from city officials, CSI operated unhindered by government action and continued, albeit unsuccessfully, to engage the Government in a dialogue.

As they were not one of the recognized religions, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) expressed some concerns about the status of its local workers. The Government had not formalized in writing its 2003 agreement allowing Mormon missionaries to operate in the country, fearing such a written agreement would set a legal precedent that other nonreligious foreign workers could try to exploit.

In February 2006, hearings began in the case of Minh Luong Dang, founder of the Spiritual Human Yoga (SHY), and Vo Hinh Hiep, his former representative in the country. The two faced charges of committing fraud and illegally practicing medicine. The movement was on the parliamentary list of sectarian organizations, but the trial concerned the two defendants personally. Since the opening of the litigation in 1999, no SHY groups in the country had been banned or denied permission to teach and apply Dang's techniques.

In April 2006, the Brussels Appellate Court ruled that the Francophone Community Government must cease circulating a flyer in which anthroposophism was labeled as a dangerous sect. The court awarded one euro symbolic damage to the plaintiffs.

Some courts in the Flanders region have stipulated, in the context of child custody proceedings and as a condition of granting visitation rights, that a noncustodial parent who is a member of Jehovah's Witnesses may not expose his or her children to the teachings or lifestyle of that religious group during visits. These courts claimed that such exposure would be harmful to the child; however, other courts had not

imposed this restriction, and other sources stated that custody issues rather than religion prompted the decisions.

Religious or "moral" instruction was mandatory in public schools and was provided according to the student's religious or nonreligious preference. All public schools provided teachers for each of the six recognized religions, if a sufficient number of pupils wished to attend. Public school religion teachers were 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 were known as "free" schools. They received community government subsidies for operating expenses and buildings. Teachers, like other civil servants, were paid by their respective community governments.

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 forty-eight anti-Semitic incidents during 2005 and twelve incidents during the first two months of 2006. Most incidents took place in Antwerp, and to a lesser extent in Brussels. Verbal abuse was the most common complaint, together with the painting of anti-Jewish graffiti. As in the past, incidents appeared to have been generated from the Muslim immigrant community.

In April 2005, a youth threatened a group of Jewish boys with a knife in Antwerp. The young assailant was arrested. Later that month in Antwerp a Jewish boy was knocked off his bicycle and sustained injuries. In November a Jewish elder was harassed by local youths. By the end of the reporting period, no court action had started in these cases.

The Antwerp First Instance court handed down a six-month prison sentence and payment of a fine to a Moroccan immigrant for insulting and threatening a Jew. The same court sentenced a local inhabitant to a six-month suspended prison sentence for issuing threats against a Jew. The Brussels first instance court convicted a Brussels National Airport employee of tagging baggage coming from Israel with anti-Semitic slogans. The judge suspended his verdict, while imposing special working conditions on the defendant.

Observers noted that courts in the country were becoming less lenient on anti-Semitic offences and that an increasing number of judges had taken such cases.

In April 2006, the Brussels Chamber of Indictment ruled that Roeland Raes, a former far-right Vlaams Blok vice-chairman and former senator, would have to stand trial for denying the Holocaust during a television show in 2001.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, several religious groups reported incidents of private discrimination, particularly Jews and Muslims, as well as religious groups that have not been accorded official "recognized" status by the Government.

Prejudice in the private sector against members of the Muslim community was not unknown, affecting housing, employment, and, in some cases, education. However, these prejudices affected primarily the North African communities (including both immigrant and first-generation). Muslims of Turkish and other national origins appeared to be far less frequently the targets of such prejudice, which could be described as more ethnic than religious. At the same time, Muslim-heritage immigrants were increasingly visible, particularly in the public and nonprofit sectors.

The Center for Equal Opportunity and the Fight against Racism, an independent government agency, reported that 7.5 percent of the discrimination complaints filed with the Center during 2002 cited religion as the basis of the alleged discrimination. In June 2005, the Center released a report covering 2004, which provided, among other topics, information on anti-Semitism.

At the national level, there is an annual general assembly of the National Ecumenical Commission to discuss various religious themes. The Catholic Church sponsors working groups at the national level to maintain dialogue and promote tolerance among all religious groups. At the local level, every Catholic diocese has established commissions for interfaith dialogue. The president of the National Ecumenical Commission maintains contacts with leaders of other faiths, including both recognized and unrecognized religious groups.

In March 2005, the Center for Equal Opportunity issued a comprehensive report on public symbols of religious and philosophical convictions. The 2003 act made discrimination on religious and philosophical grounds unlawful. The report found that neither Flemish nor Francophone schools imposed restrictions given by the governing authorities, nor was it left to individual schoolmasters to decide which signs would be tolerated. Most schoolmasters in the country imposed a headscarf ban on both pupils and teachers. A survey released in 2004 showed that in Brussels, of 110 surveyed schools, only 8 allowed headscarves. Schools on both sides of the country's linguistic border allow free days for attending religious festivals. The public educational system, from kindergarten to university, requires strict neutrality for teaching personnel, except for teachers of religion. The subsidized Catholic educational institution (which constitutes the largest number of educational establishments nationwide) allows the wearing of religious symbols. Schoolmasters also opposed the invoking of religious grounds for not attending certain courses, physical education classes in particular.

The federal Government has no specific directives on wearing religious symbols. The same applies in regional and municipal services. Wearing religious symbols is prohibited for selected public service officials, such as judges, police, and other uniformed officials.

In a June 2005 landmark case, the Antwerp Appellate Court, the highest court to address the issue, ruled that it was outside the jurisdiction of the state to determine whether the Muslim faith requires women to wear a headscarf. The Court ruled that, in principle, girls in public schools have the right to wear a headscarf. However, the school board also has the authority to restrict that right for organizational reasons, or for the good functioning of the school, but must justify any restrictions it seeks to impose.

At the end of 2005, approximately twenty municipalities had issued a ban on walking the streets completely veiled. In a few cases women were fined $190 (150 euros) for ignoring the ban. Under a 1993 executive order, persons in the streets must be identifiable, based on laws dating back to the Middle Ages.

In 2005, an Antwerp initiative to further dialogue between the Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim faiths received the formal backing of the King. This was a local initiative.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

U.S. Embassy representatives frequently discussed the issue of 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 applied to join the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The application had been delayed because of the overlapping competencies on the issue among the federal, regional, and language community governments, but all eventually agreed to provide the needed funding.

The embassy hosted individual 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 individuals generally enjoy this right in ethnically integrated areas or in areas where they are adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of religions in largely ethnically homogenous areas where they are in a small minority have had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently. The 2004 state-level Law on Religious Freedom also provides comprehensive rights to religious communities.

Overall, government respect for religious freedom did not change during the reporting period. The Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Serb Orthodox religious communities reported a significant number of attacks on religious objects. A number of illegally constructed religious objects continued to cause ethnic/religious tension and conflict in a number of communities. Religious communities continued to support and advocate refugee returns for their respective constituencies; however, the number of returns significantly declined during the reporting period. The return process suffered from a lack of funding for reconstruction of housing and infrastructure, local governments' inability or unwillingness to provide necessary services to allow for sustainable returns, and a lack of employment opportunities. The State Law on Religious Freedom protecting the rights of religious communities and creating a government registry allowing them to establish legal status was being implemented at the end of the reporting period.

Religious intolerance in the country directly reflected ethnic intolerance because of the virtually indistinguishable identification of ethnicity with one's religious background. Bosniaks generally were associated with Islam, Bosnian Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and Bosnian Serbs with the Serb Orthodox Church. The Jewish community maintained a very small but important presence in Bosnian society. There were also several small Christian denominations throughout the country. Despite the constitutional and legal provisions protecting religious freedom, discrimination against religious minorities occurred in virtually all parts of the country. In some communities, local religious leaders and politicians contributed to intolerance and an increase in nationalist feeling through public statements and on occasion in sermons. Religious symbols were often misused for political purposes.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from the four traditional religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and reconciliation. The U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo supported the religious communities in their efforts to receive restitution of property nationalized by the communist government of the former Yugoslavia after World War II. The embassy also assisted small Christian communities in obtaining 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 administrative district in Brcko (Brcko District). The country has an area of 31,816 square miles. In 2004, the World Bank estimated that the population was 3.9 million, although a reliable census has not been conducted since 1991. Reliable statistics on the precise membership of different religious groups remained unavailable.

According to the U.N. Development Program's Human Development Report 2002, Muslims constituted 40 percent of the population, Serb Orthodox 31 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, Protestants 4 percent, and other groups 10 percent. Many persons who identified with a major ethnoreligious group were atheists or agnostics who did not regularly practice any religion. The small Jewish community had approximately 1,000 believers and maintained a special place in society by virtue of its long history of coexistence with other religious communities and its active role in mediating among those communities. There were also foreign missionaries who preached fundamentalist forms of Islam that tended to be intolerant of other religions and other forms of Islam. 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.

The rate of religious observance remained relatively low among the traditional religious groups; however, some areas of significantly greater observance did exist, for example among Catholic Croats in the Herzegovina region. For many Bosnian Muslims, religion often served as a community or ethnic identifier, and religious practice was 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 people as an expression of increased identification with their ethnic heritage, in large part due to the national religious revival that occurred as a result of the 1992–1995 Bosnian war. Younger believers who grew up in the post-communist period also had more freedom to practice their religions and more access to religious education. Leaders from the three main 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 1992–1995 war caused internal migration and refugee flows, which segregated the population into separate ethno-religious areas. In-

creased levels of returns, which peaked in 2002, continued to slow significantly in 2005–2006, 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 remained. 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 shifted the ethno-religious 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 2006, after the return of 6,500 Bosniaks, the population was 38 percent Bosniak. Similarly, in Prijedor municipality in the RS, about half of the prewar Bosniak population of 49,500 returned, partially reversing the effects of ethnic cleansing. Returns of Catholics to central Bosnia also took place in smaller numbers.

There were eight muftis located in major municipalities across the country: Sarajevo, Bihac, Travnik, Tuzla, Gorazde, Zenica, Mostar, and Banja Luka. The more conservative Islamic communities in Bosnia were located in the Federation in towns such as Travnik, Bocinja/Zavidovici, Tesanj, Maglaj, Bugojno, and Zenica. The Catholic community maintained its Bishops' Conference as an overarching organizational and regional structure, with bishops residing in Mostar, Banja Luka, and Sarajevo; the Franciscan order maintained its strongest presence in central Bosnia near Sarajevo and in Herzegovina. The Serb Orthodox Church maintained its greatest influence in the RS, with the most influential bishops residing in Banja Luka, Trebinje and Bijeljina. The small Jewish community, like most other small religious groups in Bosnia including Protestants, had its strongest support in Sarajevo.

Missionary activity was limited but growing, and included a small number of representatives from the following organizations, some of which had their central offices for the region in Zagreb or another European city outside of the country: Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Krishna Consciousness, and the Baptist Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The State Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and individuals generally enjoyed this right in ethnically integrated areas or in areas where they were adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of minority religions in areas where one group represented an overwhelming majority had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently. The constitutions of both entities also provide for freedom of religion.

The State Constitution 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 military. As a result of the government structure created by the Dayton agreement, which ended the Bosnian conflict in 1995, parliamentary seats and most government positions are apportioned specifically to members of the three "constituent peoples." These stipulations often result in constitutional discrimination against "others" and sympathizers of certain faiths who do not fit neatly into these three groups. For example, the country has a three-member joint presidency composed of one representative chosen specifically from each of the three major ethnic groups, with a chairmanship that rotates every eight months. As an attempt to address this lack of opportunity for members of other religious faiths, the president of the Jewish community—again, by virtue of the Jewish community's general impartiality in the political arena—was by common consensus accorded the leadership of the important Civil Service Agency, which is tasked with selecting civil servants for government posts based on merit.

Bosnia's state-level Government does not officially recognize any religious holidays. During the reporting period, Parliament failed to agree on a state law on national holidays. Entity and cantonal authorities routinely recognized religious holidays celebrated by members of the area's majority religion, with government and public offices closed on those days. Locally observed holy days included Orthodox Easter and Christmas in the RS, Catholic Easter and Christmas in Herzegovina, and Kurban Bajram and Ramadan Bajram in Sarajevo and central Bosnia.

The State Law on Religious Freedom governs religion and the licensing of religious groups, and 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 religions within the Bosnian Ministry of Justice, while the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees is tasked with documenting every violation of religious freedom.

According to the provisions of the law, any group of 300 adult citizens may form a new church or religious community with a written application to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice will issue a decision within thirty days of the application, and an appeal may be made to the Bosnian Council of Ministers. The law, which came into force in March 2004, allows minority religions in the country to register legally and to operate without unwarranted restrictions. By the end of the reporting period, all small religious communities that applied to the Ministry of Justice were successfully registered.

Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remained powerful and continued to identify closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic group. Some political parties claimed to be multiethnic. Some clerics characterized hard-line nationalist political sympathies as part of "true" religious practice. Some religious leaders were also significantly involved in politics, becoming increasingly vocal during the pre-election campaign period and during the public debate over whether Parliament should adopt changes to the Bosnian constitution. For example, in June 2006, the Serb Orthodox bishop in Trebinje signed a petition calling for a referendum on whether the RS should be "independent" from BiH. Also in June, Cardinal Puljic made public statements in which he stated that the hostile attitude of local Muslims contributed to the low numbers of Bosnian Croat returns. In a lecture in June 2006, Reis Ceric compared recent meetings between Catholic and Orthodox officials without the presence of Muslim representatives to the 1991 meetings between former Croatian President Franjo Tudjman and former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic at which they discussed the potential partition of BiH. Bosnia was scheduled to hold general elections in October 2006.

The lines dividing politics, ethnic identity, and religion were often blurred, particularly during pre-election periods, when religious sermons and services were sometimes misused for campaigning purposes. 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.

During the reporting period, the entity, cantonal, and municipal governments gave varying levels of financial support to the four major religious communities. Religious communities tended to receive the most funding in areas where their adherents were in the majority. Religious education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is largely decentralized, as is the education system generally. In 2005, the international community encouraged the state-level Ministry for Civil Affairs (MCA) to take a coordinating role in developing education policy. However, the understaffed MCA education department failed to take an active role in creating a national education policy. Cantonal governments in the Federation, the entity Government in the RS, and Brcko District have responsibility for education policy. Public schools offer religious education classes, but with the exception of Brcko, schools generally offer religious instruction only in the area's majority religion. In theory, students (or their parents, in the case of primary school students) have the option to choose not to attend these classes. However, in practice, students of the majority religion and sometimes also of minority religions face pressure from teachers and peers to attend the classes. For example, the RS requires Serbs to attend Orthodox religion classes but does not require attendance for Bosniaks and Croats. However, Bosniak and Croat students often attend these classes anyway because they are reluctant to be singled out as different from their classmates. If a sufficient number of students of minority religion(s) attend a particular school (twenty in the RS, fifteen in the Federation), the school is required to organize religion classes on their behalf. However, in rural areas, there are usually no qualified religious representatives available to teach religious studies to the handful of minority students. Minority students are often widely scattered across remote areas, making it logistically difficult to provide classes even when a teacher is available. In the Federation's five cantons with Bosniak majorities, schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a two-hour per week elective course. In cantons with Croat majorities, all Croat students attend the "elective" one-hour weekly Catholic religion course for primary and middle schools.

Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, 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 and Zenica, students may attend Catholic school centers. Although primarily Croat, these schools are open to students of other ethnicities and faiths. These centers have both primary and secondary schools, and although the principals are priests, the majority of teachers are not religious offi-

cials. The curriculum is identical to the curriculum applied in schools in areas with a majority Croat population.

Facilities also existed for the three largest religious communities at the university level. The Faculty of Islamic Sciences was located in Sarajevo, the Serb Orthodox Seminary was in Foca in the RS, and two Catholic theology faculties (one run by the Franciscans and one run by the Diocese) were located in Sarajevo.

The State Law on Religious Freedom reaffirms the right of every citizen to religious education. The law calls for an official representative of the various churches or religious communities to be responsible for teaching religious studies in all public and private preschools, primary schools, and universities throughout Bosnia. However, by the end of the reporting period, this provision of the Law on Religious Freedom had not been fully implemented. Its implementation is difficult in Bosnia's often-segregated school systems, particularly where there is political resistance from nationalist party officials at the municipal level.

The 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." However, as of mid-2006, there was no state-level law on restitution, and both entity governments deferred any real attempt to resolve the issue. The State Commission for Restitution was working on drafting a state restitution law. In the absence of state legislation, return of former religious properties continued on an ad hoc basis at the discretion of municipal officials. For example, the municipal government of Banja Luka returned the building that housed the newly reopened Catholic school to the Catholic Church.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restricted religious freedom and posed major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases, local governments and police made improvements in protecting religious freedoms, although serious problems remained, including an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom occurred. For example, local police rarely made arrests in cases of attacks against religious buildings, officials, or believers. Successful prosecutions were extremely rare. Local police frequently alleged that juveniles were responsible for these attacks.

Deputies being sworn into the RS National Assembly could choose either a religious oath consistent with their religious tradition or a nonreligious civil oath. Deputies to the state and federation parliaments took nonreligious civil oaths.

The State Constitution provides for proportional representation for each of the three major ethnic groups in the Government and the military. Because of the close identification of ethnicity with religious background, this principal of ethnic parity in effect reserved certain positions in Government and the military for adherents or sympathizers of certain faiths. The military in the RS was staffed overwhelmingly by ethnic Serbs and had only Serb Orthodox chaplains. The Federation military was composed of separate Bosniak and Croat units, as well as integrated units, and has both Muslim and Catholic chaplains. During the reporting period, both entities passed legislation that created a unified, state-level Ministry of Defense and Bosnian Army. The Ministry of Defense planned to develop an integrated professional chaplain corps.

In early post-war years, RS authorities frequently did not intervene to prevent the violent obstruction of efforts to rebuild some of the 618 mosques and 129 churches in the RS that were destroyed or significantly damaged during the 1992–1995 war. The most recent such incident was in 2001 when a violent protest disrupted the laying of the cornerstone for the reconstruction of the historic Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka. Local police also subsequently failed to conduct a serious investigation into most of these incidents. In Zvornik, a past source of conflict between the Islamic community and the local government was eliminated when the municipal assembly allocated land for a new mosque to be built. By the end of the reporting period, construction had not yet begun.

During the reporting period, the municipality of Travnik in the Federation partially complied with a 2003 decision by the Human Rights Chamber (now 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 Roman Catholic Archdiocese. The municipality returned half the building to the Archdiocese for use as part of its Catholic school center. However, the other half remained in use as a public school. The court ordered the public school to move out of the building by July 1, 2006, but this would not be possible as the local authori-

ties had not constructed a new public school building. At the end of the reporting period, negotiations on a timeline for the full return of the building continued.

In the absence of a law governing property restitution, municipal and cantonal authorities have broad discretion regarding disposition of contested property nationalized under the communist government of the former Yugoslavia. Many officials 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 was seeking the return of the building which housed the University of Sarajevo's Economic Faculty and compensation for the land on which the state parliament building was located. The Jewish and Muslim communities also had claims to substantial portions of what was prime Sarajevo commercial real estate. The Catholic community had a large number of potential claims in Banja Luka.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The RS and Federation Governments, local governments, and police forces frequently allowed an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom could take place. Reported attacks on religious buildings, officials, and minority believers remained frequent during the reporting period. The misuse of religious symbols and buildings for political purposes had a negative impact on interreligious dialogue and interethnic relations in many communities. The absence of a police force willing to protect religious minorities, and of a judicial system willing to prosecute crimes against those minorities, posed major obstacles to safeguarding minority rights. While new officers continued to be accepted into the police academies under strictly observed ethnic quotas, the goal of establishing effective, professional, multiethnic police forces throughout the country would take years of concentrated effort. Administrative and financial obstacles to rebuilding religious structures impeded the ability of religious minorities to worship freely and contributed to the slow return of minority refugees in many areas.

A significant number of citizens remained internally displaced or refugees abroad following the 1992–1995 war. Virtually all had fled areas where their ethno†religious community had been in the minority or had ended up in the minority as a result of the war. Both organized and spontaneous returns peaked in 2002, and they continued to fall sharply in 2005–2006.

There were a number of controversial and highly politicized cases involving the illegal construction of religious buildings or monuments on private or government-owned land. In these cases, the buildings or monuments were built to send a political message to minority believers about the dominance of the majority ethno-religious group in that area, creating ethnic tensions and impeding the process of reconciliation. Three significant cases remained unresolved during the reporting period: The presence of a Serb Orthodox Church on the property of a Bosnian Muslim woman in the RS town of Konjevic Polje, despite the absence of local Serb residents; the presence of a Serb Orthodox church, again in the absence of Orthodox believers, in the middle of a majority Islamic community in the RS town of Divic; and the presence of a large stone cross and cement foundations for the stations of the cross in the ethnically divided town of Stolac in Herzegovina. In August 2005, local authorities in a Catholic-majority area ordered the destruction of the mosque in Jasenica on the grounds that the mosque had been built illegally. The Mostar mufti protested this decision, arguing that the mosque existed before the war and therefore the Islamic community was reconstructing a preexisting religious object. The issue remained unresolved at the end of the reporting period.

Although former Foca Mayor Nedeljko Pavlovic and Gorazde Mufti Hamed Efendic agreed to the reconstruction of a Muslim religious facility in Foca in 2003, a notoriously hard-line Serb municipality in the RS, reconstruction had not begun by the end of the reporting period.

In May 2004, the former Federation minister of spatial planning ordered the removal of the Stolac stone cross and cross foundations, and after a number of delays in response to political and religious sensitivities, a lawsuit was filed in April 2005 which prevented the implementation of the removal order pending a ruling by the Constitutional Court. The lawsuit remained unresolved during the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

Acts of anti-Semitism against the small Jewish community in the country were relatively infrequent. In December 2005, a local television station with limited viewership broadcast a program which denied the Holocaust. In January 2006, there was no official recognition of international Holocaust Memorial Day in BiH. In May 2006, graffiti reading "Kill Jews" appeared on a wall in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilidza. Jewish leaders noted a tendency to mix anti-Israeli sentiment with anti-Semitism, as the general public and the media often failed to distinguish between criticism of Israeli policy and anti-Semitic rhetoric.

In January 2005, two anti-Semitic articles written by a local journalist were published in the Islamic extremist SAFF magazine and the tabloid magazine Walter. In addition to making general anti-Semitic statements (for example, denying the Holocaust), the articles accused the Jewish community and some of its individual members of corruption and conspiracy. One article included an altered photograph depicting the leader of the Jewish community wearing a yarmulke, a Hitler mustache, and an armband with Star of David insignia.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Catholic and Orthodox bishops of the country continued to meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern. In July 2005, more than 2,000 Catholics attended the consecration of the newly reconstructed church in the RS town of Doboj. In September 2005, the Catholic school center in Banja Luka reopened for the first time since the end of World War II.

In April 2006, the Government and the Holy See signed a basic agreement regulating the legal status of the Catholic Church in BiH. This agreement represented the culmination of six years of lobbying by church officials, who expressed satisfaction with its scope and provisions.

The Islamic community continued to reconstruct mosques throughout the RS, including the Osman Pasha Mosque in Trebinje and mosques in Konjevic Polje and Visegrad. During the last half of 2005, eighteen reconstructed mosques in the RS were reopened. The Islamic community estimates that it has reconstructed 130 mosques in the RS since the end of the war.

The leaders of BiH's four traditional religious communities participated in the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continued to operate despite occasional significant disagreements. Franciscan friar Ivo Markovic directed the "Pontanima" interfaith choir, which performed music from all four communities.

In July 2005, the leaders of the four traditional religious communities attended the ceremony marking the tenth anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre. In November 2005, the leaders of the Serb Orthodox, Jewish, and Muslim communities attended an interfaith conference in the United States during the commemorations of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton peace accords. Cardinal Vinko Puljic, the head of the Catholic Church in BiH, declined to attend on the grounds that the Dayton agreement had harmed the interests of the Bosnian Croat people, and that it would therefore be wrong for him to attend events related to the anniversary.

Beginning in September 2005, the Ministry of Education of Sarajevo Canton introduced an hour-long history lecture in the Jewish museum for all primary and secondary school students.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Until the nineteenth century, most of the country's residents identified themselves by religious affiliation. With the rise of Balkan nationalism in the nineteenth century, the country came to identify itself in ethnic as well as religious terms. This tendency increased during the communist era when the regime discouraged religious affiliation and targeted religious officials for harassment and persecution, including arrest and detention. Under the communists, most of the country's population identified themselves by ethnic group or simply as "Yugoslavs." Bosniaks were not considered an official ethnic group. Only with the adoption of the 1974 Yugoslav constitution could Muslims identify themselves as such in the census. Following the country's independence, there continued to be persons who declined to accept either ethnic or religious identification and considered themselves simply Bosnians.

Religious buildings, clerics, and individual believers in any area where they constituted a religious minority bore the brunt of retaliation for discrimination and violence perpetrated by other members of their religious/ethnic groups in areas where those groups constituted the majority. Because they were powerful symbols of religious identification and ethnicity, clerics and religious buildings were favored tar-

gets. 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.

The 1992–1995 war was not a religious conflict. However, the association of ethnicity and religion is so close that the bitterness engendered by the war and the large-scale casualties it caused contributed to mutual suspicion and distrust among members of all three major religious groups.

Despite the constitutional and legal provisions for religious freedom, some discrimination against religious minorities occurred in virtually all parts of the country. Discrimination remained a serious problem in the RS, particularly in the eastern RS, and in Croat-dominated areas of the Federation; discrimination against non-Muslims appeared also to have worsened in some Bosniak-majority areas where more conservative Islamic communities resided. Some Muslim communities in areas where Wahhabis and other Islamic fundamentalist movements have gained adherents were deeply divided over how to worship, dress, and perform certain religious ceremonies, including funerals.

While Sarajevo, the Bosniak-majority capital of the country, had preserved in part its traditional role as a multiethnic city, complaints of discrimination remained during the period covered by this report. Some non-Muslims reported feeling isolated and marginalized in the nation's capital. In February 2006, Muslims in Sarajevo protested the publication of a cartoon of Muhammad in a number of European countries. Although the protests were generally peaceful, protestors burned a Croatian flag during one demonstration because the cartoon was published in Croatian newspapers. This action provoked criticism from Bosnian Croats. Protestors also burned Norwegian and Danish flags.

Numerous buildings belonging to the Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic communities were damaged or destroyed during the 1992–1995 war, usually in a deliberate attempt at ethnic intimidation. Despite the increase in issuance of building permits for reconstruction of religious buildings by Federation and RS authorities, the religious communities lacked funds to rebuild these facilities.

In the immediate postwar period, the major religious communities avoided reconstruction of the more symbolic religious facilities in the country, such as the Ferhadija mosque in Banja Luka, the Aladza mosque in Foca, and the monastery at Plehan near Derventa. The monastery at Plehan was partially reconstructed, and efforts were underway to rebuild the church in Plehan with financial support from the Bosnian Croat diaspora. Reconstruction of the historic Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka had not begun by the end of this reporting period, but the Islamic community had the necessary permits and was collecting money to fund the construction.

Numerous incidents against religious targets in all three ethnic majority areas were reported throughout 2005 and the first half of 2006. All the major religious communities in the country reported an increase in the number of incidents during the period covered by this report.

There were a number of incidents directed at Bosniak Muslims during the period covered by this report. In June 2005, Muslim graves were desecrated near Prijedor in the RS. In July 2005, insulting graffiti were painted on the wall of the Zvornik mosque. In October 2005, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the mosque in Prijedor was vandalized on three separate occasions. In February 2006, the Islamic community building in Banja Luka was vandalized. Unknown persons wrote insulting or anti-Muslim graffiti on the walls of the Hadziosmanija mosque in Banja Luka in January 2005, on the house of an imam in Balinovac, near Mostar, in April 2005, and on the mosque in the RS town Zvornik in July. In December 2005, unknown persons vandalized Muslim gravestones in Banja Luka.

There were also incidents directed at Bosnian Croats and the Roman Catholic Church during the period covered by this report. In January 2006, unknown perpetrators placed a grenade launcher and a traffic sign on the bell tower of the Catholic church in Drvar, in the RS. In February 2006, the windows of the Church of Saint Mark in the Sarajevo suburb of Ilijas were broken by vandals. Two local men were subsequently arrested and the case was forwarded to the Sarajevo Canton prosecutor.

There were incidents directed against members of the Bosnian Serb Orthodox community during the period covered by this report. Serb Orthodox priests working in the Tuzla area reported that funeral services were disrupted by local residents shouting anti-Serb slogans on several different occasions. The church in Puracic near Lukavac was vandalized in January 2006.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from all four traditional religious communities in the context of its overall interfaith dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government supports the return of refugees, democratization, and protection of human rights throughout the country. The U.S. Government also encourages leaders from all major religious communities to promote a multiethnic society that is conducive to religious freedom. The embassy publicly criticizes instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities or buildings and encourages political leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to respond equally strongly. Strong U.S. Government support for full implementation of the Dayton Accords and a politically moderate, multiethnic government is intended, over time, to improve respect for religious freedom in the country.

When the local Seventh-day Adventist Church encountered difficulties in registering their religious community, the embassy intervened on their behalf with the responsible officials at the Ministry of Justice. The subsequent resolution of remaining problems with the Church's registration application allowed the Church to legally register and operate throughout the country.

The embassy has also continued to lobby strongly for the drafting and adoption of a State Law on Restitution, which would assist religious communities in obtaining return of their former property. The embassy supported a number of specific initiatives by religious communities to get back their properties, including the efforts of the Serb Orthodox Church to reclaim its former theology faculty building in downtown Sarajevo.

The ambassador frequently meets with the principal religious leaders, individually and collectively, to urge them to work toward moderation and a multiethnic society. Other embassy personnel regularly meet with representatives of all religious communities to discuss religious freedom concerns. The ambassador is a member of the Executive Board of the Srebrenica Foundation, which oversees the continued development of the memorial and cemetery dedicated to victims of the 1995 massacre of Srebrenica-area Muslim men and boys in Potocari.

The U.S. Government funded the development of the countrywide human rights and democracy courses currently being taught in all Bosnian secondary schools. In 2005, this project was expanded and the course was being taught in madrassahs and at the Faculty of Islamic Sciences.

In addition, the embassy engages in an active outreach program with the religious communities at all levels, including hosting speaking engagements by visiting U.S. academics and lecturers, meeting with faith-based charities, and supporting a university affiliation program between the University of Sarajevo and the University of Arizona to create a department of comparative religious studies.

BULGARIA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law prohibits the public practice of religion by unregistered groups. The constitution also designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the "traditional" religion.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance, particularly in the media, of some religious groups remained an intermittent problem.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 42,855 square miles, and its population was approximately 7.76 million at the end of 2004, according to the National Statistical Institute. The majority of citizens, estimated at approximately 85 percent, identified themselves as Orthodox Christians. Muslims comprised the largest minority, estimated at approximately 13 percent; other minorities included Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Gregorian-Armenian Christians, and others. Among the ethnic-Turkish minority, Islam was the predominant religion. While not officially enumerated, academic research estimated up to 40 percent of the population was atheist or agnostic. Official registration of religious organizations was handled by the Sofia City Court; it

reported that twelve new denominations were registered between February 2005 and February 2006, bringing the total number of registered religious groups to seventy-three denominations in addition to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church (BOC), a nearly 20 percent increase.

Some religious minorities were concentrated geographically. The Rhodope Mountains (along the country's southern border with Greece) were home to many Muslims, including ethnic Turks, Roma, and "Pomaks" (descendents of Slavic Bulgarians who converted to Islam under Ottoman rule). Ethnic-Turkish and Roma Muslims also lived 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 were located in the region around Plovdiv. Many members of the country's small Jewish community lived in Sofia, Rousse, and along the Black Sea coast. Protestants were dispersed more widely throughout the country. While clear statistics were not available, evangelical Protestant groups had particular success in attracting converts from among the Roma minority, and areas with large Roma populations tended 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 Bulgarians who identified themselves as Orthodox Christians participated in formal religious services. The same survey found that 90 percent of the country's estimated 70,000 Catholics regularly engaged in public worship. Approximately 30 percent of Catholics belonged to the Eastern Rite Uniate Church. The majority of Muslims, who were estimated at 750,000, were Sunni; 50,000 were classified as Shi'a. The Jewish community was estimated at 3,500, and approximately 50,000 were said to be evangelical Protestants. The report also noted that more than 100,000 Bulgarians practice "nontraditional" beliefs. (Orthodox Christianity, Hanafi Sunni Islam, Judaism, and Catholicism were generally understood to be "traditional" faiths.) Forty percent of these "nontraditional" practitioners were 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, including several Protestant churches, the Catholic Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses, were 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 allows only legally registered denominations to perform public activities outside their places of worship. The 2002 law transferred responsibility for registering religious groups to the Sofia City Court, which is responsible for maintaining the national register of religious denominations as well as the register of political parties. The Council of Ministers' Religious Confessions Directorate, which was formerly responsible for registration of religious groups, provides "expert opinions" on registration matters upon request of the Court. However, the Directorate's overall role remains ambiguous, particularly as it pertains to its administrative oversight and sanctioning functions. 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. These complaints were less frequent than in previous years.

Representatives of some evangelical Protestant churches reported problems in obtaining permits for public services from local authorities, particularly in the Dobrich and General Toshev municipalities.

A Council of Europe review of the 2002 Denominations Act, prepared in early 2003, highlighted that the provisions dealing with the process of registration specify neither the criteria establishing the basis on which the court should grant registra-

tion nor the grounds on which such registration can be withheld. The act also fails to specify the consequences of failure to register as a religious community or outlines any recourse if a competent court refuses to grant registration.

The three-year legal dispute surrounding leadership of the Muslim community remained unsettled, despite the Sofia City Court's May 11, 2005, attempt to resolve the issue by formally registering Mustafa Alish Hadji as Chief Mufti. Rival Islamic leader Nedim Gendzhev filed an appeal, and in December 2005, the Sofia Appellate Court ordered Gendzhev's registration as leader. In January 2006, the City Court issued official certificates of registration to both parties in the dispute—to Gendzhev on January 25 and to Hadji on January 26. This allowed both sides to claim legal recognition and control of community funds. Accusations of embezzlement were traded, and many observers criticized the court procedure as opaque and politically influenced. The legal status of the case remained unclear at the time of this report.

On November 5, 2004, the Pazardzhik District Court passed a three-year suspended sentence on Ahmed Ahmed Musa for preaching radical Islam and instigating societal hatred along religious lines. He was also fined for disgracing the national flag. During the trial, Musa made a full confession and pleaded guilty to the charges brought against him. Five doctors confirmed that he suffered from paranoid schizophrenia and as such was extremely susceptible to outside influence. Musa chose not to appeal the sentence.

The 2002 Denominations Act designates the Metropolitan of Sofia, currently Patriarch Maxim, as the Patriarch of the BOC. The law prohibits any group or person who has broken off from a registered religious group from using the same name or claiming any properties belonging to that group.

In 2004, prosecutors and police intervened to evict members of the Bulgarian Orthodox "Alternate Synod" from properties claimed by the BOC after a twelve-year schism in the BOC. Priests from the Alternative Synod, who oppose Patriarch Maxim's leadership, were forcibly evicted from approximately 250 churches and other properties, and several clerics were temporarily detained. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported police beatings of clergy and lay persons. Alternative Synod representatives responded by filing a complaint before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and were granted an accelerated hearing in June 2005. The case was pending before the ECHR at the end of the period covered by this report, as were several smaller cases in the country's courts 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 multi-denominational Protestant seminary, and university theological faculties operated freely. Bibles, Qur'ans, and other religious materials in the Bulgarian language were imported or printed freely, and religious publications were produced regularly.

An optional religious education course was first introduced in state-run schools in 1997. The curriculum, developed by the Ministry of Education's Commission on Religion, initially focused on Christianity but was expanded in 1999 to cover Islam as well. The course examines the historical, philosophical, and cultural aspects of religion and introduces students to the moral values of different confessions. All officially registered religious confessions can request that their religious beliefs be included in the course's curriculum. According to the Ministry of Education, the course was offered to 13,209 primary and secondary school students in 199 schools during the 2004–2005 academic year. While the ministry provides the course material for free to students, the 166 religious education teachers participating in the program are funded directly from municipal budgets.

The Chief Mufti's Office also supports summer Qur'anic education courses.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The law requires religious groups wishing to operate and be recognized as legal entities, as well as those wanting to engage in public activities outside of their places of worship, to formally register with the Sofia City Court. The number of groups registered with the court increased from thirty-six in 2003 when the Court took over this responsibility, to seventy-three in 2006.

While the state of religious freedom has improved for some nontraditional groups, some groups continued to face limited discrimination and antipathy from some local authorities, despite successfully registering through the Sofia City Court. Article 21 of the 2002 Denominations Act states that nationally registered religious groups may have local branches according to their statute. The law does not require formal local registration of denominations, although some municipalities have 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. In March 2005, the Burgas Municipal Council adopted a new ordinance repealing previous limitations on the right of nontraditional religious groups to publicly practice their beliefs.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that police in several towns issued arrest warrants for members of the denomination who attempted to proselytize. On June 12, 2005, the deputy mayor of Plovdiv fined Hans Amon, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, for violating a local decree on public order by distributing brochures with religious content. Despite previous hostility in Burgas toward nontraditional groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the denomination's local branch was included in the mayor's list of local religious groups in January 2005. The Jehovah's Witnesses completed construction of a new place of worship in Burgas in 2005; however, the group also reported that the building was vandalized several times.

A number of religious groups recognized that foreign missionaries and religious leaders experienced difficulties in obtaining and renewing residence visas in the country because the Law on Foreign Persons has no visa category that explicitly applies to missionaries or religious workers. The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the Government twice refused residence visas to two missionaries from Germany, even though the denomination had received approval for their activities and stay in the country from the Religious Confessions Directorate. Some missionaries have resorted to staying in the country as "tourists," forcing them to limit the length of their visits to no more than thirty days every six months.

On October 26, 2005, the Government denied Unification Church leader Sun Myung Moon permission to enter the country. The Ministry of Interior cited its inability to provide security as the reason for canceling Moon's visit, which coincided with a nationwide security crackdown following the gangland killing of the country's wealthiest businessman. Moon's visit had sparked security concerns due to planned protests by nationalist groups and religious leaders opposed to his visit.

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, the Catholic Church, the Muslim community, the Jewish community, and several Protestant denominations all complained that a number of their confiscated properties had not been returned. For example, the Catholic Church reported that only 60 percent of its confiscated properties had been restituted.

A high-profile restitution case involving the Jewish community ended in defeat in July 2005, when the Supreme Cassation Court denied the community's claim to part of a high-value property in central Sofia which was once the site of a Jewish school. Previous court defeats had held that the petitioning organization was unable to establish its lineage back to the original owners of the property. In contrast, the July appellate ruling acknowledged the organization's lineage but held that the expropriation procedure was properly executed by the Communist government in the 1960s, and that the community was not legally entitled to any further compensation. Both foreign and domestic observers expressed concern about possible manipulation of the judicial process. The community's request for an extraordinary judicial review of the July decision was denied in March 2006, effectively exhausting all judicial remedies. In an attempt to find an equitable political solution to this and other outstanding restitution cases involving the Jewish community, the Government established an inter-ministerial commission in May 2006 to study alternate forms of compensation.

The constitution prohibits the formation of political parties along religious lines.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

The country's small Jewish community became a target of the extremist political party Ataka, which employed anti-Semitic rhetoric during the June 2005 parliamentary election campaign. Both the newspaper launched by Ataka in October of that year and the group's website (www.ataka.bg) contain anti-Semitic material. Ataka is not a member of the governing coalition, and politicians from all sides of the political spectrum have spoken out against its extremist message.

Police arrested three teenagers who had admitted desecrating more than one hundred Turkish graves in Haskovo on April 8, 2005. The three youths, who had acknowledged an interest in the skinhead movement, were reportedly intoxicated when they decided to vandalize the cemetery. The investigation was ongoing at the time of this report.

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, thirty-seven new religious groups have registered with the Sofia City Court since 2003.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance of some religious groups remained an intermittent problem. While human rights groups reported that societal discrimination against nontraditional religious groups has continued to gradually lessen in recent years, it was not uncommon for the media to disseminate negative and derogatory stories about nontraditional denominations. For example, the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses both reported numerous print and broadcast media stories with negative, derogatory, and sometimes slanderous information about their activities and beliefs.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy regularly monitors religious freedom in ongoing contacts with government officials, members of Parliament (MPs), clergy and lay leaders of religious communities, and NGOs. Embassy officers met with Orthodox leaders and clergy, senior 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 reports of discrimination against religious organizations; with various religious groups and government entities regarding the restitution of properties; and with Muslim leaders regarding Islamic extremism and the Muslim leadership dispute.

CROATIA

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church enjoyed a close relationship with the state not shared by other religious groups. The legal position of most major religious communities improved because of agreements with the state, which grant benefits similar to those enjoyed by the Catholic Church.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and the coalition Government that took power in 2003 continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Religion and ethnicity were linked closely in society. Following independence in 1991, religious institutions of all faiths were victimized by the ethnic conflicts that led to the breakup of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In 2005, there were occasional reports of intimidation and vandalism, particularly in the war-affected areas, directed against Serbian Orthodox clergy and property, although those incidents remained sporadic.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials frequently met with representatives of religious and ethnic minority communities and with government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 21,831 square miles and a population of approximately 4,437,000. The religious breakdown of the country was approximately: Roman Catholic, 85 percent; Orthodox Christian, 6 percent; Muslim, 1 percent; Jew-

ish, less than 1 percent; other, 4 percent; and atheist, 2 percent. Before the emergence of the pro-Nazi Ustasha regime in Croatia during World War II, the Jewish community numbered some 35,000 to 40,000. An estimated 6,000 Jews were thought to have survived the war, and the community was thought to number about 2,000 during the period covered by this report.

The statistics regarding religious affiliation correlated closely with the country's ethnic makeup. The Orthodox, predominantly ethnic Serbs associated with the Serbian Orthodox Church, primarily lived in cities and areas bordering on Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro. Members of other minority religions resided mostly in urban areas. Most immigrants were Roman Catholic ethnic Croats from Bosnia.

Protestants from a number of denominations and foreign clergy actively practiced and proselytized, as did representatives of Asian religions. A variety of missionaries were present, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Greek Catholics, Pentecostals, Hare Krishnas, and a wide range of evangelical Protestant Christians (including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Church of Christ, and various nondenominational organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, Islamic community, and other smaller Christian denominations that have signed agreements with the state, receive some state support.

The 2002 Law on Legal Status of Religious Communities broadly defines religious communities' legal positions and covers such issues as government funding, tax benefits, and religious education in schools. Other important issues, such as pensions for clergy, religious service in the military, penitentiaries and police, and recognition of religious marriages, were left to each religious community to negotiate separately with the Government. Most religious communities considered the law an improvement over the previous state of affairs. Restitution of nationalized or confiscated church property is regulated under the 1996 Law on Return of Property Expropriated or Nationalized during the Yugoslav communist rule, which was amended in 2002. As of mid-2006, only persons who obtained citizenship by October 1996 may file claims under Croatia's restitution law. The Government plans to propose an amendment to the law that would allow foreigners to file claims on an equal basis with Croatian citizens. As of mid-2006, the Government had not yet submitted the proposed amendment to Parliament. With regard to the period covered by the 1996 restitution law, government officials stated that a 1999 Constitutional Court decision has the legislative effect of allowing claims relating to confiscations during the previously excluded period of World War II to be considered under the law's provisions.

In 2003, the Government approved a regulation on the registration of religious communities, known as the Regulation on Forms and Maintaining Records of Religious Communities in Croatia, which required all religious communities to submit registration applications within six months. The regulation stipulates that, to register, a religious community must have at least 500 believers and must be registered as an association for five years. All religious communities in the country prior to passage of the law are being registered without conditions; religious communities that are new to the country since passage of the law must fulfill the requirements for the minimum number of believers and time registered as an association. By the end of the period covered by this report, approximately forty religious communities had been registered and seventeen additional communities applied for registration. Registered religious communities are granted the status of a "legal person" and enjoy tax and other benefits under the Law on Religious Communities. Religious communities that are based abroad must submit written permission for registration from their country of origin. The Helsinki Commission reported earlier in 2004 on requirements to register new religious communities, but prominent human rights organizations, including the Croatian Helsinki Committee, said in 2004 that the requirements were well within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) standards. In December 2005, three churches—the Church of the Full Gospel, the Alliance of Churches "Word of Life," and the Protestant Reformed Christian Church—challenged in the Constitutional Court the Government's refusal to conclude agreements that would provide them benefits similar to those provided by

agreements with the Catholic, Serb Orthodox, Islamic, and other communities. The Government maintained that the churches did not meet its requirements of having a minimum number of members and of being continuously active in the country since 1941. The appeal was pending in the Constitutional Court at the end of the period covered by this report. No specific licensing is required for foreign missionaries.

In line with the concordats signed with the Catholic Church and in an effort to define their rights and privileges within a legal framework, agreements have been signed with the following religious communities: The Serbian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Community (2002); the Evangelical Church, Reformed Christian Church, Pentecostal Church, Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ, Christian Adventist Church, Union of Baptist Churches, Church of God, Church of Christ, and the Reformed Movement of Seventh-day Adventists (2003); and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Macedonian Orthodox Church, and Croatian Old Catholic Church (2003). The Jewish Community of Zagreb, which facilitates "coordination" with ten other Jewish communities, sought to sign an agreement with the state in November 2005. The text was similar to that offered by the Government in 2003, which was refused by the Community because of lack of progress on property restitution. Signing was once again delayed as another Jewish group contested the Community's membership requirements. That group, the Jewish Religious Community Beth Israel, requested state registration as a new and separate entity in September 2005, following a split in the Community after the decision not to renew the contract of the country's first Rabbi. As of May 2006, the Central State Office for Administration was considering these requests. The Government's general approach is to negotiate agreements with individual religious communities based on a common framework rather than set uniform, nondiscriminatory standards and practices. Leaders of non-Roman Catholic religions, with the exception of the Serb Orthodox Church, expressed general satisfaction with the communication they had with the Government.

In July 2005, Croatian Radio Television (HRT) signed an agreement with eight minority religious communities guaranteeing equal representation in its programs. HRT agreed to live broadcasts of important annual celebrations and minimum weekly and monthly coverage. Under an agreement with the Roman Catholic Church, HRT provided up to 10 hours per month of regular coverage of Roman Catholic events, while the other religious communities received 10 minutes of coverage or less.

The Roman Catholic Church operates one of the country's private national radio stations, Catholic Radio, which is financed by private contributions. There are no restrictions on religious broadcasting. Topics of interest to major non-Roman Catholic religious groups are covered regularly on weekly religious programming on HRT.

The Roman Catholic Church, on several occasions, reacted to its treatment in the media. In May 2005, the Catholic Radio Marija Association collected more than 40,000 signatures requesting that a satirical cartoon series critical of the Catholic Church be removed from national television. The Association also sent an open letter to the OSCE disagreeing with the organization's view that the program was an expression of civic and media freedoms. Political leaders reacted in February 2006 when the weekly Nacional printed the controversial Danish cartoon of Muhammad. President Mesic described this as an unwise move and said that "...balance needed to be kept between the principle of freedom of speech and the need not to hurt anyone's religious sentiments." Prime Minister Sanader also considered this as "a wrong editorial move," and the Government stated that, while advocating full freedom of media, it maintained that "articles containing disparagements and mocking another's religion, nationality or world-view should by no means be published in the media." Bosnian Muslims in Sarajevo burned a Croatian flag in front of the Croatian Embassy in protest against the publishing of the cartoons.

The Islamic community's Bairam ceremony, usually attended by high-level government officials, is telecast live annually from the Zagreb Mosque. The Islamic community credited the monthly TV broadcast Ekumena for contributing significantly to an atmosphere of greater tolerance.

Muslims have the right to observe their religious holy days. They are granted a paid holiday for one Bairam and have the right to observe the other as well, although they are not paid for the second day. The Ministry of Education recognizes the diploma conferred by the Muslim community's secondary school in Zagreb.

Missionaries did not operate registered schools, but the Mormon community provided free English lessons which were normally offered in conjunction with education on the Mormon religion.

There was no government-sponsored ecumenical activity.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government imposes no formal restrictions on religious groups, and all religious communities are free to conduct public services and to open and run social and charitable institutions.

There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives financial state support and other benefits established in concordats between the Government and the Vatican. The concordats and other agreements with non-Catholic religious communities allow state financing for some salaries and pensions for priests and nuns through government-managed pension and health funds.

The concordats also regulate recognition of marriages, public school catechisms, and military chaplains. The Ministry of Defense employs fifteen full-time and four part-time Catholic priests and chaplains. After the Government signed an agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church, five Orthodox priests began service in prisons and penitentiaries; the Islamic Community deployed one imam in the same service. In October 2005, the Government signed a protocol with the Islamic community that guarantees that members of the armed forces and recruits of the Muslim faith have regular access to chaplains, are provided with halal meals, and are excused from duty during major holidays. According to internal army polls in 2004, fifty-five conscripts and active members of the armed forces requested Muslim pastoral care.

Marriages conducted by the fifteen religious communities that have agreements with the state are officially recognized, eliminating the need to register the marriages in the civil registry office.

Facilitating the return of refugees (primarily ethnic Serbs) remained a challenge for the Government, which 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 issues. Serbian Orthodox officials reported that the number of Serbian Orthodox clergy, which had been reduced to 30 after the 1991–1995 war, increased to 128. The increase was greatest in the Dalmatian and Karlovac eparchies. Orthodox Church sources ascribed the rising number of new priests, mostly from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro, to the increase in Serb returnees. Orthodox Church sources complained that the new priests, particularly in Knin, continued to have difficulties with renewing their working 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. While religion and ethnicity were closely linked in society, the majority of incidents of discrimination were motivated by ethnicity rather than religion or religious doctrine. Discrimination continued in some areas against ethnic Serbs and, at times, other minorities, including the administration of justice, employment, and housing.

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 Catholic catechism is the predominant religious teaching offered in public schools. Schools that meet the necessary quota of seven students of a minority faith per class allowed separate religion classes to be held for the students. In cases where there are not sufficient numbers of students of a minority faith to warrant separate classes, students may exercise the option to receive religious instruction through their religious community. In 2003, government officials estimated that 4,500 primary and secondary school children in 37 schools attended Serbian Orthodox religion classes, the majority of which were in Eastern Slavonia, Rijeka, and Gorski Kotar. Orthodox Church sources reported that the number of students in 2005 rose to approximately 5,000, of which 4,050 were in Eastern Slavonia. Local Orthodox clergy commended the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, the GOC Institute for Education, and the Catholic Church in Djakovo diocese for good cooperation. In 2005, after initial resistance, principals of two schools in Knin permitted Serbian Orthodox religion classes for the approximately 500 primary and secondary school children eligible to attend. However, Orthodox clergy complained that authorities in one of the primary schools allowed only half of the guaranteed number of classes, and, in the other school, pupils of Serb ethnicity were dispersed throughout the school so that the legally required minimum of seven students per class could not be reached. Similar resistance by local school boards to establishing Serbian Orthodox religion classes in schools continued in Imotski. In 2005, Serbian Orthodox officials reported that many school children and their parents remained reluctant to identify themselves as Serbian Orthodox to avoid being singled out. Similarly, the Orthodox clergy noted that children in the Karlovac area were reluctant to openly attend their religious education for fear of being ostracized.

In September 2003, the Jewish Community of Zagreb opened the first private Jewish elementary school in the country. The Government annually observes January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day with seminars and commemorative events.

The secondary school operated by the Islamic Community for religious training was at full capacity (102 students); the community intended to gradually convert the school into a more general secondary school while at the same time developing an institution of higher education specifically for religious training. The community postponed its plans to open a Faculty of Islamic Studies at the Zagreb Mosque in order to meet academic requirements. It planned to open an Islamic institute for higher education in September 2006 that would educate both clergy and laity and provide training for religious teachers in the schools. The minister of culture, in charge of relations with religious communities, expressed support for the project. Authorities representing the Islamic community continued to report good cooperation and dialogue with the Government. The Orthodox Church opened a religious secondary school in September 2005 that had ten students during the period covered by this report, with plans to expand in the coming years. The Roman Catholic Church intended to establish a university in Zagreb in 2007. (See below.)

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. A 1998 concordat with the Vatican provided for the return of all Roman Catholic Church property confiscated by the communist regime after 1945. The agreement stipulated that the Government would return seized properties or compensate the Church where return was impossible. Some progress was made with some returnable properties being restituted, and there were instances of compensation for non-returnable properties. In 2003, the Roman Catholic Church submitted a list of priority properties for restitution to the Government that included large commercial buildings, recreational property, and several properties already in use by the Church, such as monasteries, dormitories, and residences for children with disabilities. Catholic Church officials reported the return of a few properties over the last year, while some claims ran into open opposition by local authorities. Prime Minister Ivo Sanader met with the Zagreb Archbishop Josip Bozanic in May 2006 and agreed to sign a contract to hand over the King Tomislav army barracks complex as a compensation for other yet unspecified church property in Zagreb. The building will be used to house the Catholic University, which was scheduled to begin its program in the fall of 2007. The Government signed a letter of intent in July 2005 to hand over the property and expressed full support for the project. The press reported that the city of Zagreb returned the Komedija theatre in the city center to the Franciscan Monastery. The theatre would continue to use the building for the next fifteen years under a favorable rent agreement.

In March 2006, the press reported that the Varazdin town and county authorities opposed restitution of the former monastery in the town's center in which the Computer Science College is located. The building is listed as one of the remaining fifteen capital objects in the country intended for restitution. City authorities disputed the legal basis of the claim and cited its substantial investment in the building. According to the Varazdin bishop, the town's mayor agreed in 2002 to relocate the college, and the Church protested against widespread media reports perceived as pressure intended to influence the procedure. This was the only remaining claim made by the Church in Varazdin at the end of the period covered by this report, because a monastery, currently used as a medical school, was returned in February 2006 to the Order of Ursuline nuns. Negotiations remained stalled on the Government's offer of a 25 percent stake in the Croatia Osiguranje insurance company that opened three years ago.

Other than the Law on Return of Property Expropriated or Nationalized during Yugoslav communist rule, there were no specific property restitution agreements between the Government and non-Roman Catholic religious groups. The Serbian Orthodox community, the second largest claimant of property in the country, reported that its joint restitution subcommission with the Government had not convened during the year, despite repeated requests. It reported that restitution in 2005 was minimal, and expressed particular concern over the lack of progress in restitution of several valuable business and residential buildings in downtown Zagreb. In 2005, reconstruction of a number of Orthodox churches began across the country. Most notably, the Ministry of Reconstruction funded and worked on the landmark St. Nicholas Church in the center of Karlovac, which was demolished during the war. Overall, sources in the Serbian Orthodox Church believed that the Government had been slow to follow through on its commitments but commended good relations with the president's cabinet. The Church continued with legal action initiated in 2004 against current owners of forty previously church-owned and then nationalized flats

in Zagreb in order to prevent further sale. No progress was made in any of these cases or in the return of properties that belonged to monasteries, such as arable land and forests.

Several Jewish properties, including some Zagreb buildings, were not returned. The Jewish community stated that the process of returning nationalized property in Zagreb was halted in 2005 and had made no progress since. The Jewish community of Osijek reported some progress on the return of property in Osijek and Vukovar; in 2004, the property on which the former synagogue of Vukovar stood was returned. Other claims remained stalled in court at the end of the reporting period.

The Muslim community had no property claims. Its major issue concerned the construction of a mosque in Rijeka after several years of delays because of administrative obstacles and local community protests related to its location. An acceptable alternate site was found, and the community expected the construction to begin soon after the authorities adopted the city zoning plan in June 2006. Plans existed to build a mosque in Osijek. In 2005, city officials offered a favorable site that was connected to existing infrastructure.

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

Generally, acts of anti-Semitism were rare. In April 2005, the Jewish community and some international organizations received a threatening, anti-Semitic letter. Police investigated but identified no suspects. In June 2006, police pressed charges against a twenty-one-year-old student for sending two threatening e-mails to the Zagreb Jewish Community. In the messages, the author insulted victims of the Holocaust, Jews, and the black race. He also expressed hope for "the Iranians to complete a nuclear bomb as soon as possible and launch it on Haifa and Tel Aviv," after which celebrations would be held in Zagreb's streets.

Also in June, two youths wearing shirts with Nazi insignia verbally and then physically assaulted the rabbi of the Jewish Community in Zagreb. Police continued an investigation at the end of the period covered by this report.

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 faiths. Such incidents continued to occur sporadically during the period covered by this report and were primarily directed against Serbian Orthodox clergy and property.

During the period covered by this report, human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and religious leaders noted that overall ethnic and religious relations remained stable. The exceptions were incidents involving harassment of clergy and desecration and vandalism of Serbian Orthodox Church property, which continued to occur sporadically. In Dalmatia, Serbian Orthodox officials reported an increased number of incidents of verbal threats and isolated physical attacks against clergy and property. Serbian Orthodox officials continued to complain that local police investigations rarely led to identification or legal action against perpetrators.

The majority of reported incidents against both Orthodox Church property and clergy occurred at the end of 2005 prior to Orthodox Christmas.

For example, in December 2005, the Orthodox Church and the NGO Serb Democratic Forum reported that a group of young men smashed the entrance to the St. Sava Church in Split and shouted threats such as "Kill the Serbs," and continued to cause damage on nearby streets. In Zadar, in December, offensive graffiti referring to a Serb Orthodox saint and Ustasha symbols were sprayed on the fence of the St. Ilija Church. Church sources reported that an unknown perpetrator lit a fire in front of the Orthodox Diocese building. The fire was contained before spreading to the adjacent park. Police investigated but did not identify perpetrators in any of these cases. Similarly, unknown persons damaged the shutters of the Orthodox residential and administrative building in Osijek and pasted the windows with threatening messages such as "Serbs should hang." The perpetrators were not identified.

In September 2005, the Serb Democratic Forum reported that a group of unknown attackers threw stones at the Church of the Assumption in Drnis in the Dalmatian

hinterlands while the priest was inside the church. The men yelled, "Do not toll the bell; this is not Serbia." The police arrived shortly afterwards but were not able to apprehend the perpetrators. In October 2005, a group of young men jumped over the wall of the Sibenik eparchy courtyard shouting anti-Serb slogans, and demolished garden furniture and window shutters. Police identified three perpetrators and indicated to the media that the incident had no political significance. Despite its low profile in Croatia, the foreign minister of Serbia and Montenegro (SaM) sent a protest note to his Croatian counterpart, and the SaM ambassador visited Sibenik and asked local authorities to guarantee the security of Serbs and their places of worship.

Sporadic, small-scale incidents occurred elsewhere in the country. For example, in August, human rights NGOs reported that a group of young men rushed into the courtyard of the parish's Orthodox priest in Slatina in the early morning hours, yelling ethnically-based epithets. The police intervened quickly and filed a report against the perpetrators for disturbing public order. The priest did not file criminal charges for the ethnically-motivated abuse.

The Muslim and Jewish communities reported no major incidents of violence or harassment toward religious persons or sites during the period covered by this report; however, during Bairam holidays in November 2005, a plaque on the Dubrovnik Mosque was burned and the fire partly damaged the entrance door. Similarly, a plaque was removed from the front wall of the Islamic community building in Split in February 2006. In both cases the police investigated but did not identify any suspects. Local Islamic community leaders expressed concern about the incidents as they echoed similar cases of vandalism in 1993 and 1997.

Relations between the Government and the Jewish community steadily improved over the past several years. However, President Stepan Mesic (who held a nonpartisan, partly ceremonial head-of-state position) spoke out publicly in support of one specific Jewish group after the Zagreb Jewish Community split in mid-2005 over the issue of whether to renew, for an eighth year, the contract of the rabbi. While generally supportive of ethnic and religious minority groups, the president criticized the decision not to renew the rabbi's contract and suggested that the rabbi was to be expelled "according to the same principles by which the Nazis drove Jews into concentration camps." Community leaders criticized the president's perceived interference.

In March 2005, President Mesic visited the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem and acknowledged that inappropriate statements by prior leaders caused mistrust between Israel and Croatia. In June 2005, Prime Minister Sanader made his first official visit to Israel, where he met with then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and paid respect to the victims of the Holocaust at the Yad Vashem memorial. In April 2006, President Mesic spoke at the Holocaust commemoration ceremony at the Jasenovac concentration camp; the ceremony was attended by representatives of Parliament, Government, and national minorities, as well as representatives of the Orthodox, Jewish, and Catholic faiths. In November 2005, Croatia became a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. Preparations were under way to open a memorial museum and educational center by the end of 2006 at the Jasenovac Memorial Area.

While the Roman Catholic Church officially seeks no role in political life, it campaigned through its most prominent institutions, including the largest Catholic Church charity, Caritas, on several topics of public interest. Along with the Center for Promotion of Social Teaching and the Franciscan Institute, Caritas campaigned for the law that would ban all stores from opening on Sundays, and, in March 2006, they approached the minister of economy for support. In late 2003, Caritas campaigned for legislation based on the church-state concordats that would ban most retail stores from opening on Sundays. A law restricting business activities on Sundays was enacted in January 2004; however, the Constitutional Court overturned the law in April 2004 after major retailers appealed the law citing financial losses. In March 2006, the same organizations challenged the proposed privatization of water resources on the grounds that access to spring water must be handled transparently and for the public good.

In March 2006, authorities rescinded the license to a U.S. film crew that intended to film parts of horror movie Omen 4 in Split after the local Roman Catholic authorities campaigned against it. The Ministry of Culture issued all relevant permits in December 2005, but the Church in Split and authorities in the nearby town of Solin objected to the use of the Split city center and Solin cemetery, causing the annulment of the permits. The media reported that some film sets were vandalized and burned.

The Roman Catholic Church continued to exercise influence over the Government's social policies. For example, in January 2005, the Church publicly criticized

the international Global Fund's MEMOAIDS educational program, designed to raise AIDS awareness in secondary schools. The Church objected to the mention of the use of condoms in the program, stating that it encouraged promiscuity.

In his interviews and sermons in April 2006, Cardinal Bozanic referred to internal and foreign policy topics. He called for precise laws to ban corruption, calling it one of the greatest evils of society. He also supported Croatia's EU aspirations, but called first for a definition of national interests and preservation of the country's identity. In May 2005, the Bishops' Conference invited Prime Minister Sanader to speak to the group about EU integration, Croatia's cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), and the role of the Church in relation to these processes. In September 2005, the media reported that the country's representatives of the Catholic organization Iustitia et Pax criticized the work of the ICTY, stating that the Tribunal's practices did not guarantee justice and that arresting the then-fugitive general Gotovina should not be a condition for Croatia's negotiations with the EU. Senj-Gospic Bishop Mile Bogovic made similar statements in September, criticizing the ICTY prosecutor as biased and suggesting that the ICTY is a political court. However, such statements were not echoed by Cardinal Bozanic, and the Church, in line with government policy, took a moderate position.

Since Cardinal Bozanic took office as archbishop of Zagreb in 1997 and became head of the Croatian Bishops' Conference (HBK), the Catholic Church's leadership sought a more proactive role in advocating ethnic and religious reconciliation. Ecumenical efforts among the religious communities developed in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. For example, religious leaders met frequently to discuss issues of mutual interest and to cooperate and coordinate with the Government Commission for Relations with Religious Communities.

In the spring of 2005, Croatian dailies reported on repeated acts of violence and sexual abuse in the home for mentally incapacitated children in Brezovica run by the leading Catholic charity Caritas. Criminal charges were brought against the director, who was suspected of covering up the evidence and preventing criminal proceedings against the orphanage staff. One employee was arrested. In August 2005, the archbishop of Zagreb replaced the director. Approximately one year after press allegations about the abuse, Zagreb's Archdiocese Visitation inspected and found no irregularities or abuse. The head of the inspection team complained that their work was impeded by inappropriate, negative media coverage.

According to surveys published in July 2005, the Catholic Church's traditional reputation as an institution that enjoys the most public trust was affected by these reports.

In March 2006, the editor of the Catholic religious program at the national television station HRT received negative media attention when he dismissed the sign language interpreter on the grounds that she was going through a divorce. The editor argued that it was inappropriate for a divorced person to appear in a religious program and that he had received complaints from the viewers to that effect. The HBK distanced itself from the move. In April 2006, the HRT Program Council reinstated the interpreter and fined the editor.

According to the results of a survey published in May 2005 by the international research agency GFK Marketing Research Center, citizens placed the most trust in the Catholic Church, the president, and persons close to them, as opposed to the Government, judiciary and political parties, which occupied the opposite end of the scale. According to the same survey, this high level of trust had remained unchanged over the past five years.

In February 2006, the Muslim community in Zagreb hosted the Bosnian Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceric, who presented a Declaration of European Muslims. The Declaration, which received considerable media attention, invited Muslims to accept European democratic standards and appealed to EU countries to officially recognize Islam in order to make it less vulnerable to external influences. Croatian Mufti Sevko Omerbasic noted that Croatia was one of four countries in Europe that officially recognizes Islam and in which the indigenous Muslim community was successfully integrated into society.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the coalition Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and actively works to encourage the Government to respect religious freedom in practice. U.S. Embassy officials met frequently at all levels with representatives of religious communities and minority groups and engaged in the promotion of human rights, including the religious rights of these groups. The embassy organized the visit of a U.S. author

and expert on Islam in the Balkans. That visit generated significant media attention on the author's message of tolerance and religious freedom in Europe. In addition, the embassy supported the construction of an interethnic, interreligious seniors' home in an ethnically mixed community near the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project was organized by the local Muslim community in cooperation with Caritas.

During the period covered by this report, Phase II of the International Partnership among Museums (IPAM) was implemented between the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the Jasenovac Memorial Area. (IPAM is a U.S. State Department-administered international museum exchange program in collaboration with the American Association of Museums.) The partnership's previous work in Phase I concentrated on technical expertise exchange, such as preserving and managing collections, developing a joint web site, and conducting research. Phase II concentrated on efforts to educate the public about the Holocaust and the history of the Jasenovac concentration camp. Activities consisted primarily of personnel and expertise exchanges, both in person and electronically. The United States was supporting the development of a Holocaust Education Center at Jasenovac Memorial through the expertise of the USHMM. The education center would provide workshops for student tour groups.

In January 2005, the USHMM participated in a Ministry of Education seminar for history teachers on studying and teaching the Holocaust. In the summer of 2005, four history and sociology teachers traveled to the United States, and five more history teachers participated in the same program in June 2006. In addition, the embassy was funding the translation and printing of a USHMM handbook on teaching the Holocaust. The project commenced in 2004 in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and with the Jasenovac memorial area. In November 2005, 700 handbooks about the Holocaust were distributed to high schools, and plans existed to reprint and distribute approximately 2,000 brochures to primary schools in the fall of 2006.

In cooperation with Yad Vashem and the Visual History Foundation, the Jewish Community prepared a brochure that analyzes history textbooks for primary and secondary schools; the brochure was scheduled to be publicized in September 2006. The authors—several prominent historians—cited a lack of information concerning Jewish ethnic identity and culture and on the genesis of anti-Semitism, which would provide the historical context for anti-Semitism in Croatia and the Holocaust. For example, historians observed that the existing textbooks implied that implementation of racist laws had no roots in the NDH (Independent State of Croatia) but occurred exclusively under the influence of Germany.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Cyprus has an area of 5,747 square miles, and the population in the Government-controlled areas was estimated at 766,600.

Prior to 1974, the country experienced a long period of strife between its Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. In response, the U.N. Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) began peacekeeping operations in 1964. The island has been divided since the Turkish military intervention of 1974, following a coup d'etat directed from Greece. The southern part of the island is under the control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, while the northern part is 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 checkpoints to cross from one side to the other.

Approximately 96 percent of the population in the Government-controlled areas belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus. An estimated 0.7 percent of the remaining population was Maronite, slightly less than 0.4 percent was Armenian Orthodox, 0.1 percent was Latin (Roman Catholic), and 3.2 percent belonged to other groups. The latter category included small groups of Protestants and Jews and immigrants of various religious beliefs, including Muslims and Buddhists.

In July 2005 the first Buddhist temple in Cyprus opened in Nicosia. In September, Cyprus's first new synagogue in at least twenty years opened in Larnaca.

A 1998 opinion poll indicated that an estimated 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 was some Protestant missionary activity in the Government-controlled area.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 1960 constitution specifies that the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, which is not under the authority of the mainland Greek Orthodox Church, has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with its holy canons and charter. The Church of Cyprus is exempt from taxes with regard to religious activity, and according to law, is required to pay taxes only on strictly commercial activities. Under the 1960 constitution, the same applies to the Vakf, or Evkaf, the Muslim institution that regulates religious activity for Turkish Cypriots and which operates only in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Three other religious groups are recognized in the 1960 constitution: Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Christians, and Latins (Roman Catholics). These groups also are exempt from taxes and are eligible, along with the Church of Cyprus and the Vakf, for government subsidies to their religious institutions.

The Government of Cyprus has constitutional or 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 authorities; however, if they desire to engage in financial transactions, such as maintaining a bank account, they must register as a nonprofit company. To register, a group must submit an application through an attorney that states the purpose of the nonprofit organization and provides the names of the organization's directors. Upon approval, nonprofit organizations are tax-exempt and are required to provide annual reports of their activities. Registration is granted promptly, and many religious groups are recognized. No religious groups were denied registration during the reporting period.

There are no prohibitions against missionary activity or proselytizing in the Government-controlled areas. Foreign missionaries must obtain and periodically renew residence permits in order to live in the country; normally, renewal requests are not denied.

The Government requires children in public primary and secondary schools to take instruction in the Greek Orthodox religion. Parents of other religions may request that their children be excused. These children are exempted from attending religious services and instruction. In the past, however, some Jehovah's Witnesses parents reported that their children were not excused from all religious instruction.

In February 2006 the Ministry of Education announced that it was preparing a proposal to reduce the number of hours of religious instruction required in public schools from two hours to one hour per week. The Church of Cyprus and other religious organizations strongly objected. The ministry promised that no new regulations would be adopted without appropriate debate and discussion.

The Government of Cyprus recognizes the following holy days as national holidays: Epiphany, Annunciation, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Holy Spirit Day, Assumption Day, and Christmas.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion in Cyprus. In 2001, however, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Government of Turkey was responsible for imposing restrictions on the movement of Greek Cypriots in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots, which limited their access to places of worship.

Since 2003, when restrictions of movement were relaxed, Greek Cypriots have reported relatively easy access to Apostolos Andreas Monastery and other religious sites in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. Likewise, Turkish Cypriots enjoyed relatively easy access to religious sites, including Hala Sultan Tekke in the Government-controlled area.

Missionaries have the legal right to proselytize, but the Government closely monitors missionary activity. It is illegal for a missionary to use "physical or moral compulsion" to make religious conversions. The police may investigate missionary activity based on a citizen's complaint. They may also open an investigation if missionaries are suspected of being involved in illegal activities that threaten the security of the republic, constitutional or public order, or public health and morals. In the past there were occasional apprehensions but no arrests under these laws.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from active military duty; however, they are legally required to complete an alternative military service and perform reservist duty in the Greek Cypriot National Guard.

In May 2006 a nongovernmental organization (NGO) reported that it had filed complaints with the Ombudsman's Office and the independent body formed in April to investigate the police regarding police treatment of Muslim asylum seekers.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There were polite relations between the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus and the other religious communities in the Government-controlled area.

In April 2005 a Turkish Cypriot cemetery in Larnaca, which had recently been rehabilitated as part of a U.S.-funded project aimed at improving bi-communal relations, was vandalized. In 2005, there were also reports of Turkish Cypriot cemeteries in the Government-controlled area being destroyed for the construction of roads and other development.

Although Turkish Cypriots occasionally have reported that unused mosques in the Government-controlled area have been vandalized, the Government of Cyprus routinely maintains and repairs them.

The Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus is suspicious of any attempts to proselytize among Greek Cypriots and closely monitors such activities. Religion is a prominent component of Greek Cypriot society, with considerable long-standing cultural and political influence. During the 1950s, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios III, led the Greek Cypriot campaign for independence and served as president from independence in 1960 until his death in 1977. While the preeminent position of the Church of Cyprus has been somewhat reduced in recent years, it remains an important power center in politics. As the largest owner of real estate in Cyprus and the operator of several large business enterprises, the Church of Cyprus is also a significant economic actor. Present-day influence of the Church can be seen in the political messages bishops and priests regularly include in their Sunday sermons. In February 2005, an organization known as the Pancyprian Christian Orthodox Movement, with links to the Greek Orthodox Church of Cyprus, issued a booklet alleging that clubs such as the Lions, Rotary, and Boy Scouts were "recruiting grounds for Freemasonry" and were thus a danger to Cypriot society.

In March 2005 the Government requested that an additional Church of Cyprus priest be assigned to minister to the Greek Cypriots living in the Karpas region of the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. The enclaved community already had one full-time priest but decided it needed a second. Turkish Cypriot authorities

agreed in principle to this request, but the first proposed individual could not go for personal reasons. Turkish Cypriot authorities objected to the second individual who was proposed, claiming he disliked Turkish Cypriots and had made inappropriate statements about their community. Turkish Cypriot authorities asked that the Government nominate a different priest. At the end of the reporting period, the position remained open and the Government had not nominated a new priest.

In November 2005 press reports claimed that the police and the municipality had harassed the Buddhist temple in Strovolos. The municipality allegedly claimed that the temple did not have the proper license to operate as a temple, and police said they visited the site as required by law after receiving numerous anonymous and formal complaints about disturbances. There were also reports that police had visited the Jewish synagogue because of complaints of disturbances soon after its opening.

In November 2005 the Ombudsman's Office issued a report on a complaint from Jehovah's Witnesses whose child was excused from religious instruction but who was subsequently harassed by fellow students and pressured by a religious instructor. The report concluded that the student's complaint was valid and that the instructor's remarks during a lesson on religious sects violated the student's religious freedom.

In May 2006 an NGO reported complaints from recognized political asylees of Muslim origin who had difficulty securing employment because of their religion. Several women reported that potential employers did not like their headscarves. Another asylee alleged that he could not secure housing because he was a Muslim.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The ambassador and other embassy officers meet periodically with Greek Cypriot religious authorities regarding specific religious freedom concerns.

AREA ADMINISTERED BY TURKISH CYPRIOTS

Since 1974, the northern part of Cyprus has been governed by a Turkish Cypriot administration that proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC") in 1983. The 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, and Turkish Cypriot authorities generally respected this right in practice. The politically divisive environment of Cyprus, however, engendered some restrictions on religious freedom, particularly for Greek Cypriots and Maronites.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, and Turkish Cypriot policies continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a few reports of vandalism of religious sites and cemeteries.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Approximately 250,000 persons lived in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. An estimated 99 percent of Turkish Cypriots was at least nominally Muslim. There was a small Turkish Cypriot Baha'i community. Most other non-Muslims in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots were foreigners from Western Europe who were generally members of the Roman Catholic or Anglican churches. Approximately 10 percent of the population in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots attended 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.

The "TRNC Constitution" does not recognize any specific religion. It does state, however, that the Vakf or Evkaf, the Muslim institution that regulates religious activity for Turkish Cypriots, has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its

internal affairs and property in accordance with Vakf laws and principles. The Vakf is tax-exempt in its religious activities, but its commercial operations are subject to the applicable taxes. The Vakf also receives official subsidies. No other religious organization is tax-exempt or receives subsidies. The Vakf 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, this agreement provides for facilities for religious worship.

Religious organizations are not required to register with Turkish Cypriot authorities unless they wish to engage in commercial activity or apply for tax-exempt status. There are no legal restrictions on missionary activity; however, such activity was rare.

There is instruction in religion, ethics, and comparative religions in two grades of the primary school system in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. There is no formal Islamic religious instruction in public schools, and there are no state-supported religious schools.

Turkish Cypriot authorities do not sponsor any interfaith activity.

The following holy days are observed widely in the Turkish Cypriot community: Kurban Bairam, Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Ramadan Bairam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Greek Cypriots and Maronites were prohibited from visiting religious sites located in military zones in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. Greek Cypriots and Maronites were allowed to worship at only seven sites designated by the Turkish military in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots.

Turkish Cypriot authorities once again gave permission for an Orthodox service to be held in Agias Mamas Church near the town of Guzelyurt/Morphou on September 1 and 2, 2005. In 2004, a bomb exploded in the doorway of the church during the service. During the September 2005 service, two Greek Cypriots' cars were burned in the parking lot. Turkish Cypriots maintained the fire was due to an electrical problem, but Greek Cypriot forensic tests indicated arson.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

In the area administered by Turkish Cypriots there are few non-Muslims, and no noticeable friction between them and the Muslim population.

Greek Cypriots report that unused Orthodox Church of Cyprus churches and cemeteries in the area administered by Turkish Cypriots continued to be robbed and vandalized, and the Government maintained its claim that Orthodox Church of Cyprus icons had been smuggled out of the area administered by Turkish Cypriots. In February 2005, a Greek Cypriot cemetery near Lapta/Lapithos, which had recently been rehabilitated as part of a U.S.-funded project aimed at improving bi-communal relations, was vandalized. In May 2005, Turkish Cypriot media alleged that a Greek Cypriot church committee had taken a religious icon across the buffer zone (or green line) into the Government-controlled area.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

The ambassador and other embassy officers meet periodically with Turkish Cypriot religious authorities regarding specific religious freedom concerns.

CZECH REPUBLIC

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 30,442 square miles, and its population was estimated at 10.2 million. The country had a largely homogenous population with a dominant Christian tradition. However, in part as a result of forty 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 2004 opinion poll sponsored by Cardinal Strich University, 32 percent of respondents claimed to believe in God, while 49 percent identified themselves as atheists. There was a revival of interest in religion after the 1989 "Velvet Revolution"; however, the number of those professing religious beliefs or participating in organized religion fell steadily since then in almost every region of the country.

An estimated 5 percent of the population attended Catholic services weekly, and most of these lived in the southern Moravian dioceses of Olomouc and Brno. The number of practicing Protestants was approximately 1 percent of the population. Islam was registered as an officially recognized religion in 2004, and leaders of the local Muslim community estimated that there were an estimated 10,000 Muslims in the country. There was a mosque in Brno and another in Prague. The vast majority of the country's historic Jewish community, which numbered in the tens of thousands 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, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses, were present in the country. Missionaries of various religious groups generally proselytized 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.

Religious affairs are the responsibility of the Department of Churches at the Ministry of Culture. All religious groups officially registered with the Ministry of Culture are eligible to receive subsidies from the state, although some decline to receive state financial support as a matter of principle and as an expression of their independence. There are twenty-six state-recognized religious organizations. In 2004, the Center of Muslim Communities was officially registered, the first such registration of a Muslim organization in the country. An appeal by the Unification Church to overturn their denial to register in 1999 was denied by the Constitutional Court in 2004.

The 2002 law on Religious Freedom and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations created a two-tiered system of registration for religious organizations. To register at the first (lowest) tier, a religious group must have at least 300 adult members permanently residing in the country. First-tier registration conveys limited tax benefits and imposes annual reporting requirements, as well as a ten-year waiting period before the organization may apply for full second-tier registration. To register at the second tier, a religious group must have membership equal to at least 0.1 percent of the country's population (approximately 10,000 persons). 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 1989, such as the small Jewish community, are not required to meet these conditions for registration. Unregistered religious groups may not legally own community property but often form civic-interest associations for the purpose of managing their property and other holdings until they are able to meet the qualifications for registration. The Government does not interfere with or pre-

vent 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 twenty-five mainly Christian Democratic senators 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 senators' complaint focuses upon the constitutionality of the law's wording and the level of state regulation over church-sponsored institutions. The Constitutional Court case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious organizations receive approximately $90 million (1.93 billion Czech crowns) annually from the Government. Funds are divided proportionally among the twenty-one religious organizations eligible for state assistance based on the number of clergy in each, with the exception of four religious organizations (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the New Apostolic Church, and Open Brethren) that do not accept state funding. Of this sum, approximately $32 million (818 million Czech crowns) is used to pay salaries to clergymen. The rest of the funding goes to state grants for religious organizations' medical, charitable, and educational activities, as well as for the maintenance of religious memorials and buildings.

A 2000 law outlaws Holocaust denial and provides for prison sentences of six months to three 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 ninety days. There were no reports of delays in processing visas for missionaries during the period covered by this report. There is no special visa category for religious workers; foreign missionaries and clergy are required to meet the relatively stringent conditions for a standard work permit even if their activity is strictly ecclesiastical or voluntary in nature.

Of the twenty-six registered churches in the country, nine 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 confession who require and request classes in their faith.

The Government continued its effort to resolve religious-based communal and personal 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 the majority of Jewish property claims were resolved, there was no progress in resolving the Catholic Church's claims during the period covered by this report.

The 1991 Law on Restitution applied only to property seized after the communists took power in 1948. In 1994, Parliament amended the law to provide for restitution of or compensation for property wrongfully seized between 1938 and 1945. This amendment provided for the inclusion of Jewish private properties, primarily buildings, seized by the Nazi regime. 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. In 1994, the Federation of Jewish Communities identified 202 communal properties as its highest priorities for restitution, although it had unresolved claims for more than 1,000 properties. By decree, the Government returned most of the properties in its possession, as did the city of Prague; however, despite a government appeal, other cities have not been as responsive. A few outstanding cases remain, including two properties in Brno that were under the control of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Legal proceedings were under way between the Brno Jewish Community and the state at the end of the period covered by this report.

A 2000 law authorized the Government to return more than sixty works of art in the National Gallery to the Jewish community and an estimated 7,000 works of

art in the Government's possession to individual Jewish citizens and their descendants. Another provision of the law authorized the return of certain agricultural property in the Government's possession to its original owners. Under the 2000 law, stolen works of art must be claimed by December 2006. The Federation of Jewish Communities has been lobbying for an amendment to the law which would either dismiss the 2006 deadline or extend it by another five years.

In 2001, the Federation of Jewish Communities established a Foundation for Holocaust Victims into which the Government invested approximately $11.7 million (300 million Czech crowns) from the Government's National Property Fund to pay for those properties that cannot be restituted physically. It was expected to provide partial compensation in cases where the Government needs to retain the property or is no longer in possession of it, to help meet the social needs of poor Jewish communities, and to support the restoration of synagogues and cemeteries.

Approximately one-third of the funds were dedicated to communal property, one-third to individual claims, and one-third to social programs for approximately 2,500 Holocaust survivors. Applications for the fund were first accepted in 2001, and by March 2005, the Foundation for Holocaust Victims announced the conclusion of payments totaling more than four million to approximately 500 claimants residing in twenty-seven different countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs assisted the foundation in its efforts to locate and contact survivors in other countries.

Certain properties of religious orders, including 175 monasteries and other institutions, were restituted under laws passed in 1990 and 1991. The Catholic Church continued to claim large tracts of "income-generating properties." Some of these properties were farms and woodland that were in the hands of municipal governments or private owners. Other lands were forests that were administered by the state. When the Social Democratic government came to power in 1998, it halted further restitution of non-Jewish religious communal property. Efforts to resolve the final claims continued but were slowed by the Church's refusal to provide a list of specific properties and land to which it felt entitled and the Government's refusal to continue restitution discussions without this list. There was no progress in resolving the Catholic Church's claims during the period covered by this report.

Members of unregistered religious groups may issue publications without interference.

The Ministry of Culture sponsors religiously oriented cultural activities through a grant program. The ministry sponsored some interfaith activities during the period covered by this report, including partial funding of the Christian and Jewish Society.

Easter Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day (December 26) are recognized as national holidays, although their recognition does not negatively affect any religious group.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Under the 2002 religious registration law, the Ministry of Culture has responsibility for registering religious charities and enterprises as legal entities. The Catholic Church has criticized the law on the grounds that it unduly restricts the manner in which the Church manages and finances many of its social projects. An October 2003 Constitutional Court ruling that the Ministry of Culture improperly interpreted the registration law in failing to register a religious enterprise operated by the Catholic Church in the northern Moravian town of Lipnik nad Becvou was implemented by the ministry in 2003, and the enterprise in question was registered. The Catholic Church reported that religious charities and enterprises continue to experience difficulties and delays in registering as legal entities, although there has been some recent improvement in the speed of granting registrations.

In 2006, the Armenian Apostolic Church asked the Ministry of Culture for registration. The registration is in the process of being finalized.

In April 2006, the Center of Muslim Communities petitioned the Ministry of Culture for authorization 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, within prisons and detention facilities. These activities were to be financed by the state in accordance with existing law. The Culture Ministry recommended approval of the center's proposal and a final decision by the Government was expected in mid-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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2002, Parliament passed a measure to extend the deadline for filing art restitution claims by Holocaust victims to December 31, 2006. In 2004, Parliament approved a law designating January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day in the country. Holocaust Remembrance Day was observed in January 2006 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to 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 new developments relating to the decision to halt plans to construct a mosque in Teplice.

In general, public expressions of anti-Semitic sentiment were extremely 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 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. Police shut down such concerts in July and November of 2005 and were roundly criticized by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), political leaders, and media outlets when they failed to intervene in a September 2005 concert in rural Bohemia in which participants allegedly shouted neo-Nazi slogans. Two police officials were later disciplined for failing to intervene and stop the concert.

There were no reported violent anti-Semitic incidents against individuals in the country during the reporting period and only isolated reports of property damage or vandalism. In August 2005, a Holocaust memorial in Teplice was reportedly vandalized and, in September 2005, an NGO reported that several doors and windows were broken in a synagogue in Krnov and that several gravestones in a Jewish cemetery in Velky Pecin had been defaced with graffiti. In October 2005, police reported that a commemorative stone dedicated to a Jewish artist in Jihlava was defaced. In each incident police responded with appropriate investigations. The incidents highlight the difficult task that authorities faced attempting to secure Jewish sites in rural areas that no longer served sizable Jewish communities.

In April 2006, several hundred persons attended a rally and public meeting against anti-Semitism that was sponsored by Christian and Jewish groups and supported by Prague mayor Pavel Bem and Senate Speaker Premysl Sobotka. Also in April, President Vaclav Klaus publicly commemorated Holocaust Remembrance Day in the United States with a speech to an audience of schoolchildren, diplomats, and Holocaust survivors in Los Angeles during a state visit. Similar events were also held in Prague in April. During the same time frame in April 2006, the Education Ministry also sponsored and hosted a two-day seminar on Holocaust education with other education ministers from across Europe. The guest of honor at the seminar was former President Vaclav Havel.

The Jewish Museum of Prague, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, designated 2006 as the "Year of Jewish Culture." 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 popular tourist attractions 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 dialogue and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Government efforts on religious issues have focused largely on encouraging the Government and religious groups to resolve religious property restitution claims and registration of religious organizations.

During the 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 maintains close contact with the Office of the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, representatives of various religious groups, and NGOs. Embassy officials met on several occasions with representatives of the Ministry of Culture to discuss the law on religious registration, as well as representatives of smaller religious groups affected by the law, including the Czech Muslim community. Several meetings were held with representatives from the Ministry of Culture, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Federation of Jewish Communities on restitution matters. 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 16,639 square miles, and its population was approximately 5.4 million. As of January 2006, 83 percent of the population belonged to the official Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although only approximately 3 percent of church members attended services regularly, most members utilized the church for weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, and religious holidays.

The second largest religious community was Muslim, constituting approximately 3.7 percent of the population (an estimated 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 were 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) had their own religious groups. Approximately 5.4 percent of the population described themselves as not religious, and an estimated 1.5 percent described themselves as atheist.

Missionaries operated within the country, including representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses. The European headquarters of the Church of Scientology was 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 may be compelled to pay church tax or provide direct financial support to the national church or any other religious organization. Members of other faiths, notably Catholics, have argued that the system is unfair, and that the Government does not provide religious equality, despite providing religious freedom. Allowing other religious organi-

zations to be given the same status and privileges as the Evangelical Lutheran Church would require changes to the constitution.

Eleven Christian holy days are considered national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and Christmas Day 2 (December 26). The holidays do not have a negative impact on any religious groups.

Aside from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Government gives official status to religions in two ways: It recognizes religions by royal decree, and it approves religions under the 1969 Marriage Act. As of April 2005, 12 religious organizations were recognized by royal decree, including the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and Russian Orthodox churches as well as Judaism; and 115 were approved, including several Islamic groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christian Orthodox, Hindu, Baha'is, and Hare Krishnas, and the indigenous Norse belief system known as Forn Sidr. By approving religions under the 1969 Marriage Act, the Government allows individually named priests to conduct officially recognized marriage ceremonies, and thereby legally approves the religion.

Both recognized and approved religions enjoy certain tax exemptions. Other religious communities are entitled to practice their faith without any sort of licensing, but their marriage ceremonies are not recognized by the state and they are not granted tax-exempt status.

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. "Scientologists did not seek official approval as a religious organization during the period covered by this report. Their first application for approval was made in the early 1970s and rejected; the second and third applications were made in 1976 and 1982, and both were denied. In mid-1997, the Scientologists filed a fourth application, which was suspended at their request in 2000. In suspending their application, the Scientologists asked the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs to clarify the approval procedure; however, the ministry told them they must first submit an application before the ministry could provide any feedback. Despite the Scientologists' unofficial status, the Church 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 home school or educate their children in private schools.

During the period covered by the report, the Government continued to consider legislative and administrative proposals to promote further social integration of refugees and immigrants. The proposals emerged out of widespread political and social attitudes favoring the integration of immigrants and refugees. In June 2004, Parliament enacted a law directed at foreign religious leaders seeking residence visas. The "Imam Law," which is applied by immigration authorities to all foreign religious leaders, requires that the number of religious residence visas be reasonably proportioned to the size of the corresponding religious community. Additionally, the visa applicant must prove association with a recognized or approved religious community and possess a relevant background or education as a religious preacher, missionary or member of a religious community.

The law provides 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 aged fifteen 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In April 2006, the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs officially approved the plans for the first cemetery completely dedicated to the Muslim community in the country.

The Dansk Islamisk Begravelsefond (Danish Islamic Cemetery Fund) purchased property in the greater Copenhagen area to use for a Muslim cemetery in December 2004. The purchase was the culmination of a several-year effort by members of the Muslim community to establish the first Muslim cemetery in the country. The Danish Islamic Cemetery Fund overcame a publicized dispute with municipal authorities over the value of the land, which prolonged the purchase efforts. The cemetery was expected to open in 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 isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, primarily by immigrants. Both the members of the Jewish community and police sources attested to the fact that the greatest friction was between the Jewish and Muslim communities. Ethnic Danes and non-Muslims had not been cited for anti-Semitic acts during the reporting period. Most acts involved vandalism, such as 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The country has a long history of welcoming religious minorities and affording them equal treatment. There are generally amicable relations between religious groups, although the influx of a substantial Muslim population over the last several years resulted in some tension between Muslims and the rest of the population. In May 2006, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published reports stating that the overall political climate for Muslims in the country had deteriorated. Both the IHF and ECRI noted that portions of the Danish media contributed to the general misperceptions of Islam and the negative sentiment toward the Muslim community.

In September 2005, Jyllands-Posten, a widely read daily newspaper, published a series of twelve cartoons controversially depicting satirical images of Muhammad. While the editors, citing constitutional protections of freedom of expression, maintained the cartoons represented a national tradition of robust public discourse, many observers, especially in the minority Muslim community, interpreted them as a direct attack on the Islamic faith. In early 2006, as the cartoons were republished in other European countries, a widespread international backlash erupted, turning violent in several Islamic countries. Protests within the country were peaceful. Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and his center-right coalition Government were criticized for failing to heed concerns expressed by representatives of the country's Muslim community and refusing to meet with ambassadors of Islamic countries before the cartoon crisis escalated. The prime minister expressed regret that the cartoons had offended the Muslim community but declined to reprimand the publisher or issue an official apology on behalf of the Government. The Government stated that the newspaper's publication of the drawings was a protected exercise of its constitutional right, even if the Government did not like or support the content of that expression. A broad majority of the public agreed with this position. The Government, seeking to improve dialogue with its Muslim communities and to repair its relations with the Islamic world, subsequently sponsored and participated in a number of Muslim events in and outside of the country aimed at fostering tolerance and mutual understanding.

Minority group unemployment figures, crime rates (especially among young adults), and education dropout rates tended to be higher, and allegations sometimes were raised 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 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 graffiti and low-level assaults as well as some denial of service and hiring on racial grounds. The Government criticized the incidents, investigated several, and brought some cases to trial.

The international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to operate in the country despite periodic calls by the various political parties to ban the group. In

March 2006, the Copenhagen public prosecutor brought charges against Fadi Abdullatif, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir spokesman, for making threats against Prime Minister Rasmussen and other members of the government administration. The case was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Abdullatif served sixty days probation in 2002 for distributing pamphlets calling for the murder of all Jews.

In March 2006, the Ministry for Ecclesiastical Affairs published a report regarding grave desecrations in the country. The report confirmed damage to 32 cemeteries and a total of 817 grave markers in 2005, with an additional 83 graves in 4 churches during the first quarter of 2006. There was no sectarian breakdown of the numbers. In February 2006, more than twenty Muslim graves were desecrated in Esbjerg. Authorities believed the graves were damaged in retaliation to the cartoon controversy. The police identified three juvenile suspects who were interrogated and then released to the social authorities for reprimand.

SECTION IV. U.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 community groups from the country's diverse religious backgrounds. 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 such as religious and cultural diversity, democracy and freedom, and Muslim life in the United States. The U.S. Department of State sponsored Danish Muslim leaders to participate in established International Visitors Programs focusing on diversity and multiculturalism, and developed a special summer 2006 program for nine young leaders active in Danish Muslim community building. The Department also launched, in conjunction with the Ministry for Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, an initiative to reach out to young people in diverse communities through sports and a summer internship program with American companies in the country.

In April 2006, the ambassador visited a mosque in Ishoj, an ethnically diverse suburb of Copenhagen, to discuss the political climate and economic outlook for Muslims in the country with the imam, the mayor of Ishoj, local council members and other community activists.

In January 2005, the embassy participated in targeted Global Anti-Semitism Report outreach by placing an article in the national daily Kristelig Dagblad (circulation 25,000), the country's largest-circulation religious affairs newspaper. The article stressed the need for governments to take uncompromising steps to address the issue of increased anti-Semitic abuses in Europe and Russia. By reporting numerous instances of abuse targeted at the Jewish community, and by describing the nature of both Muslim-inspired and right-wing hostility to the worldwide Jewish community, the article clearly illustrated the contemporary nature of the problem and caused the newspaper's readership to reconsider their views on the issue.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society continued to contribute to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 17,666 square miles and a population of 1.35 million (68 percent ethnic Estonian, 26 percent Russian, 2 percent Ukrainian, 1 percent Belarusian, and 1 percent Finnish). The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) was the largest denomination, with 165 congregations and approximately 170,000 members. The Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC) had fifty-nine congregations with approximately 18,000 members and the Estonian Orthodox Church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP), had thirty congregations with approximately 150,000 members. There were smaller communities of Baptists,

Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Old Believers, Methodists, and other denominations. There was a small Jewish community with 2,500 members, with a Jewish community center and a day school in operation. During a state visit to the country in September 2005, Israel's President Moshe Katsav participated in a ceremony to lay the cornerstone of a new synagogue. There were also communities of Muslims, Buddhists, and many other denominations and faiths; however, each of these religious groups had fewer than 6,000 adherents.

Fifty years of Soviet occupation diminished the role of religion in society. Many neighborhoods built since World War II do not have religious centers, and many of the surviving churches require extensive renovations. In September 2005, the first resident Roman Catholic bishop since World War II was ordained in Tallinn. 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 2004–2005. St. John's Church, which had been in ruins since 1944, was inaugurated in December 2004. The City of Tallinn has its own ongoing project for renovation of churches in the city. In 2005, renovation work took place in eight churches, including Dome Church, St. Olaf's Church, St. George's Church, and others. Church attendance, which had seen a surge coinciding with the independence movement in the early 1990s, has since decreased significantly.

Many groups have sent foreign missionaries into the country in recent years. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) had the largest number of missionaries.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 activities of religious associations are regulated by the Churches and Congregations Act and the Non-Profit Associations and Unions Act. The statutes of churches, congregations, and unions of congregations are registered at the city courts.

The Churches and Congregations Act decrees that the commanding officer of each military unit shall guarantee conscripts the opportunity to practice their religion. Military chaplain services extend to service members of all faiths. The Churches and Congregations Act decrees that prison directors shall ensure inmates the opportunity to practice their religion. Conscripts and prisoners exercised this right in practice.

A church, congregation, and association of congregations must have a management board. A person who is a citizen or who has the right to vote in local government elections may be a member 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 twelve 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 was available in public schools. A school is under obligation to offer religious studies at the primary or secondary level if at least fifteen students request it. Comparative religious studies were available in public and private schools on an elective basis. There were no official statistics on how many students participated in these classes. There were two private church schools in Tartu that had a religious-based curriculum.

The Government took steps to promote anti-bias and tolerance education. Since 2003, the Government observes the annual Holocaust and Other Crimes against Humanity Victims' Memorial Day on January 27. The country is a liaison member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. A Holocaust education seminar for schoolteachers took place in August 2004, in cooperation with a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) and Sweden's Living History Forum, and co-financed by the Ministry of Education. During the reporting period the Government provided more than two hundred schools with a thirty-minute film about Holocaust history. In August 2005, the Government, together with the Task Force, supported a seminar for history teachers to discuss best practices for teaching the Holocaust in schools. 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 religious properties were transferred from the state 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 period covered by this report, most Orthodox Church properties, including those being used by the EOCMP, were under the legal control of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC). The Government transferred seven properties to the Estonian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchy during the period covered by this report, and further transfers are planned.

According to local Jewish leaders, property restitution was not an issue for the community, as most prewar religious buildings were rented, not owned.

Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Christmas, and Pentecost are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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 between the various religious communities were generally amicable. Although the majority of citizens were nominally Lutheran, ecumenical services during national days, Christian holidays, or at public events were common.

Most of the religious adherents among the country's Russian-speaking population are Orthodox, while the Estonian majority is mostly Lutheran. There is a deep-seated tradition of tolerance of other denominations and religions.

In May 2005, two vandals knocked down thirty-nine stone crosses in a German war cemetery in Narva. The vandals were caught and pled guilty; prosecutors requested probation for one year. One church was vandalized during the reporting period. In July 2005, a drunken minor broke five stained glass windows of Viljandi St. Paul's Church and was fined. In April 2005, a fire was set at the library of Tartu St. Paul's Church. At first it was considered an accident, but in August 2005 it was established that it was an act of arson. As a result of the fire, many valuable volumes of church literature were destroyed. The police took a suspect into custody. A police investigation was ongoing at year's end. During the period covered by this report one graveyard was vandalized. A vandal damaged over twenty grave plaques as well as crosses, lanterns and benches in a Parnu cemetery. The police started a criminal proceeding. 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 2005, a person was found guilty by a district court for writing an essay that publicly incited social hatred on the basis of national origin, race, or religion. In his essay, he called for destroying all Christians, Jews, and churches. He appealed to the Supreme Court and was acquitted. In August 2005, a city court fined a person for making anti-Semitic comments over the Internet. In September 2005, a district court let the decision stand and, in December 2005, the Supreme Court confirmed the opinion.

SECTION IV. U.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, NGOs, and a wide range of figures in religious circles. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy officials continued to engage the Government and nongovernmental actors to promote dialogue and education on Holocaust issues in the country.

The U.S. Government funded a travel grant to two history and civics teachers to attend a one-week U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)-arranged training program at Appalachian State University and a two-day program at USHMM from June 26 to July 5, 2005. In the framework of the agreement between the Government and the United States on the Protection and Preservation of Certain Cultural Properties, two Holocaust memorials were opened on the sites of Nazi labor camps at Klooga and Kivioli in July 2005. In April 2006, the U.S. Embassy hosted a digital video conference between the Southern Poverty Law Center and representatives

from the Government and civil society on the subject of promoting tolerance, including religious tolerance and Holocaust studies.

FINLAND

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. According to law, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church are the established state churches.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 130,127 square miles, and its population was approximately 5.2 million. At the end of 2005, 83.1 percent of the population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and 1 percent belonged to the Orthodox Church. The percentage for the Evangelical Lutheran Church was 83.6 percent a year earlier. A total of 33,043 people left the Evangelical Lutheran Church, some 6,000 more than in 2004. The number of those who joined the Church increased by 9,559. This figure did not include the 49,443 babies who were baptized, virtually the same number as in 2004.

In the past several decades, as many as 400,000 have left the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The Research Center of the Lutheran Church asked people who left the Church to give reasons for their decision. The most common reason was that membership was of no significance to them. Younger respondents especially expressed this view. There were also some very religious people who left the Church, stating that the modern Church's message was too watered down and did not meet their deeper spiritual demands.

Other respondents said religion was of such personal nature to them that they did not need the Church to take care of it. Only about 10 percent gave the Church tax as the reason for leaving membership in the Lutheran Evangelical Church.

Pentecostal Church communities that were registered as associations had approximately 45,000 members. However, only a fraction of Pentecostal churches were registered, and the actual number of Pentecostal worshippers was probably higher. Various other non-state religions had approximately 60,000 members. An estimated 10 percent of the population did not belong to any religious group. In the past decade, the number of Muslims increased from 1,000 to approximately 20,000, most of whom were immigrants to the country. Of these, approximately 5,000 were Shiites and 15,000 Sunni. The largest single national group was Somali, but the communities also included North Africans, Bosnians, peninsula Arabs, Tartars, Turks, and Iraqis. There were four major Muslim communities in the country: The Muslim Community in Finland, the Tampere Muslim Community, Shi'a Muslims, and the Multicultural Dawa Center of Islam. There were seven Roman Catholic congregations with approximately 8,000 registered members, and two Jewish congregations with approximately 1,500 members.

All public schools provide religious and/or philosophical instruction. Students who did not wish to receive religious instruction may choose to study philosophy instead. In certain Helsinki area schools, there were more Muslim students than members of the country's second religion, Orthodoxy. Therefore, in these schools, Islam became the third most popular "philosophical subject" after the Lutheran faith and general "philosophy-of-life." The number of Muslim students increased countrywide by approximately 20 percent every year over the past three years. This trend was expected to continue for at least two to three years.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education denied permits to five out of seven groups that wished to start or expand private Christian schools. The ministry stated that concern over academic standards, particularly in science, was a significant factor in its decision. The minister of education also stated that in his view it was not the proper function of schools to promote a single religious truth. The groups in question have appealed the ministry's decision.

A 2003 Gallup poll showed that Finns held a more positive view toward Christian churches and religious groups than in a similar poll taken in 1999. Over one-half of those interviewed believed that one was accountable in an afterlife for one's deeds. Seventy-seven percent (69 percent in 1999) held positive views about the Lutheran Church, 65 percent (56 percent in 1999) held positive views of the Salvation Army, and 62 percent (51 percent in 1999) held positive views of the Orthodox Church. A majority of the population held negative views about Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Christian Science, and Islam. People were fairly evenly split on positive and negative perceptions of Judaism.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church counted everyone who entered a church for any reason as an attendee. In 2004, an attendance of nearly 18 million was registered at worship services, christenings, weddings, funerals, concerts, and other church meetings presented by the Church. The congregations had approximately 2,200 choirs and 600 musical bands, with a total membership of 44,000. The attraction of Sunday schools decreased by some 10 percent; only one child out of ten in the group of four- to ten-year-olds attended Sunday school. However, confirmation classes were the flagship of the Church's youth work, and in 2004 as many as 57,000 youngsters, i.e. some 90 percent of the age group (approximately fifteen years), attended.

In the last few decades the Evangelical Lutheran Church has started to show far greater awareness of its international responsibilities. This was reflected in increased support for missionary work and development assistance, and in a greater interest in ecumenical work. Support for missionary work has doubled since the early 1980s, and the proceeds of church collections for foreign aid have increased many times over.

Nontraditional religious groups freely 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 in the country for decades. Other groups included the Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There are two state churches: The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church. All citizens who belong to either state church pay a church tax set at 1 to 2 percent of income, varying with the congregation, as part of their income tax. Those who do not want to pay the tax must inform the applicable state church that they are leaving it. These taxes are used to defray the costs of running the churches. State churches also handle services such as recording births, deaths, and marriages, which for citizens outside these churches are handled by official state registrars. Nontraditional religious groups are eligible for some tax relief (for example, they may receive tax-free donations), provided that they are registered with, and recognized by, the Government as religious communities.

State subsidies were being planned for religious communities and were scheduled to be included in the 2007 state budget. The funds would have to be applied for separately from general tax revenues. The amount of the subsidy would be approximately $7 (5 euros) per person, although the smallest communities would not qualify for these subsidies. Although not of substantial financial significance, the subsidies would nonetheless mean a step toward greater religious equality.

To be recognized, religious groups should have at least twenty members. The purpose of the group should be the public practice of religion, and the activities of the group should be guided by a set of rules. The Government recognizes fifty-five religious groups.

The 2003 Religious Freedom Act includes regulations on registered religious communities. Their autonomy was increased, and the law on associations is extensively applied to them. As in the old law, a minimum of twenty members is required to form a religious organization. Furthermore, the new law no longer prevents a person from being a member of several religious communities simultaneously. The religious communities will decide independently whether or not their members can belong to other religious communities as well. The one-month reconsideration period and the personal notice of resignation have been abandoned. Resignation can be submitted by mail, and it takes effect immediately upon receipt.

The new law further clarifies that the religious denomination of a child is not automatically determined by the faith of the parents: The child's membership in or resignation from a religious community is always based on a separate expression

of the will of the parents/guardians, such as baptizing the child. The independence of the child has been increased so that the denomination of any person older than twelve may be changed only by permission of the person.

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion. Various government programs available through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor focus on ongoing discrimination, including discrimination based on religion. Studies and research, integration programs, and recommendations for further incorporation of immigrants into society have been the focal points of these programs. Religion has not been highlighted in particular, but remains a part of the Government's overall attempts to combat discrimination.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. There were no reports of verbal or physical violence against persons or property of any minority religious groups.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

Some citizens were not very receptive to proselytizing by adherents of nontraditional faiths, in part because of the tendency to regard religion as a private matter.

Nontraditional religious groups were generally free from discrimination despite intolerant attitudes from some members of society.

Immigrants did not encounter difficulties in practicing their faiths; however, they sometimes encountered random discrimination and xenophobia.

There were a few reports of anti-Semitic graffiti; however, there were no reports of significant anti-Semitic activity.

An issue raising some amount of discussion among the clergy was whether or not registered couples of the same sex should be given the blessings of the church. In 2003, the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church meeting decided to table two opposite proposals: One banning access to church ceremonies for those living in a registered same-sex relationship, and the other proposing church blessings for such couples. No decisions about this issue had been made by the end of the period covered by this report.

The subject of gay marriage was discussed at an Episcopal conference in September 2005; however, after the meeting, the Evangelical Lutheran Church failed to adopt a policy on registered same-sex (de facto married) couples and homosexuality. The conference set up a working group to present findings within a year.

Some registered same-sex couples may have received blessings in an unofficial capacity by some clergy. Two members of the clergy wrote in an article in a church weekly that they had given blessings to gay and lesbian couples. They said it was a matter of conscience and encouraged same-sex couples to seek church blessings. The Evangelical Lutheran Church had no official policy on the matter at the end of the period covered by this report.

Two cases served to illustrate the social liberalism among the general public on the one hand, and the more conservative view of the Church itself on the other. The Lutheran Bishop of Turku resigned in early 2005 following allegations of an extramarital affair. Although the Church hierarchy supported the resignation on moral grounds, the bishop received significant expressions of sympathy from many ordinary members, and a popular movement collected more than 5,000 signatures supporting him.

Another ongoing case involved a doctoral thesis alleging that the female clergy in the Diocese of Oulu (a conservative area in the north) suffered from discrimination, psychological violence, and harassment by the previous bishop, who was opposed to female clergy in principle. Nearly all female ministers in the diocese met with opposition from certain male colleagues and superiors. The harassment reportedly occurred from the late 1980s to the beginning of the 2000s. Most citizens strongly supported female clergy.

Another current issue of debate involves state-financed fertility treatments. Lutheran Archbishop Jukka Paarma, who occasionally expresses his views on certain political/moral issues that might also be debated in Parliament, commented on the fertility question in May 2005 at a synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

Turku. Paarma said that single women and lesbian couples should not receive state-funded fertility treatment to facilitate conception. Paarma rejected the notion that childbearing was an inherent human right that should be supported by the state in all cases. The archbishop stressed that the focus should always be on the child's rights when considering in-vitro fertilization treatment. In his opinion, these include the right to have a mother and a father. He also clearly established that he did not condemn fertility treatment, calling it a blessing for many married couples.

The organization for sexual equality in Finland (SETA) leveled harsh criticism at the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's stance on forthcoming legislation on fertility treatment. The Government proposed that lesbian couples be eligible for state-funded fertility treatment. The church opposed the plan.

State churches often speak out in support of the Finnish/Nordic welfare state model, couching social welfare state values in religious or moral terms. Preaching at the opening of the synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in May 2004, the Bishop of Espoo expressed his position on the Kyoto Climate agreement, saying the country should not withdraw from it because of short-term national interests. A senior politician of the Greens immediately commended the Church for taking a stance on an issue that was not directly related to religion, but to the general welfare of people.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall dialogue and policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives periodically met with representatives of various religious communities (both mainstream and nontraditional) to discuss religious freedom issues.

The ambassador met with a delegation of American and Finnish Orthodox Church leaders to discuss issues of shared concern, including religious tolerance, ecumenical exchanges, trafficking-in-persons, and other transnational problems confronting modern societies.

An embassy officer spoke to the Orthodox Seminary and several other religious gatherings on the relationship between church and state in the United States and on the role of American faith-based institutions in charitable assistance. This was part of an initiative by local Orthodox ecclesiastical leaders to promote tolerance and understanding.

In March 2006, the embassy hosted an outreach reception for the country's Muslim community. The reception brought together a diverse group of Muslim immigrants representing many different ethnic and religious communities. The aim of the reception was to promote discussion and debate over the experience of Muslim immigrants in the country and their concerns over religious freedom and political issues both within the country and internationally.

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 and an overall decline in the number of incidents, anti-Semitic attacks persisted. 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, and that public statements from the new president indicated the organization would take a harder line against minority religions. The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief issued a report indicating that the Government generally respected the right to freedom of religion or belief, but expressed concern about the application of the 1905 law, the treatment of cult groups and certain new religious movements, and the 2004 legislation regarding religious symbols in schools.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to freedom of religion. Anti-Semitic incidents dropped by 48 percent in 2005, but incidents persisted, most notably the kidnapping, torture, and killing of a twenty-three-year-old Jewish man. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to criticize strongly 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.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 211,209 square miles and a population of approximately 62.9 million.

In accordance with its definition of separation of state and religion, the Government did not keep statistics on religious affiliation. According to press reports, only 12 percent of the population attended religious services of any faith more than once per month. In a poll released in December 2004, 64.3 percent of the respondents indicated they were Catholic, even if they never attended religious services. Another 27 percent polled stated they had no religious affiliation, while 8.7 percent cited another religious affiliation. Of those who identified themselves as something other than Catholic, 49.4 percent were Muslim, 21.8 percent were Protestant, 7 percent were Jewish, and 21.8 percent indicated "other." A February 2004 poll indicated that 60 percent of those interviewed believed in God, and 12 percent attended religious services often. The vast majority of the population was nominally Roman Catholic, but according to one member of the Catholic hierarchy, only 8 percent of the population were practicing Catholics. Muslims constituted the second largest religious group. There were an estimated five to six million individuals of Muslim origin in the country (8 to 10 percent of the population), although estimates of how many of these were practicing Muslims varied widely. Protestants made up 2 percent of the population, the Jewish and Buddhist faiths each represented 1 percent, and those of the Sikh faith less than 1 percent. According to various estimates, approximately 6 percent of the country's citizens were unaffiliated with any religion.

The Jewish community numbered approximately 600,000. According to press reports, at least 60 percent were not highly observant, celebrating at most only the High Holy Days. The large majority of observant Jews were Orthodox. There were small Conservative and Reform congregations as well.

Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that 250,000 persons attended their services either regularly or periodically.

Orthodox Christians numbered between 80,000 and 100,000; the vast majority was associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church.

Other religions present in the country included evangelicals, Christian Scientists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Membership in evangelical churches was growing, in large part because of increased participation by African and Antillean immigrants. According to the press, there were approximately 31,000 Mormons. The Church of Scientology had 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 French Republic led the state to break its ties to the Catholic Church early in the last century and adopt a strong commitment to maintaining a totally secular public sector. The 1905 law on the separation of religion and state, the foundation of existing legislation on religious freedom, prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith. Of the country's ten national holidays, five were Christian holy days.

Religious organizations are not required to register, but may apply for tax-exempt status or to 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. To qualify, the group's purpose must be solely the practice of some form of religious ritual. Printing publications, employing a board president, or running a school may disqualify a group from tax-exempt status.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 109 of 1,138 Protestant associations, 15 of 147 Jewish associations, and approximately 30 of 1,050 Muslim associations have tax-free status. Approximately one hundred 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 fifty associations of the Jehovah's Witnesses have tax-free status.

According to the 1905 law, associations of worship are not taxed on the donations that they receive. However, the prefecture may decide to review a group's status if the association receives a large donation or legacy that comes to the attention of the tax authorities. If the prefecture determines that the association is not in fact in conformity with the 1905 law, its status may be changed, and it may be required to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on present and past donations.

The 2001 About-Picard Law tightened restrictions on associations and provided for the dissolution of groups, including religious groups, under certain conditions. These include: Endangering the life or the physical or psychological well-being of a person; placing minors at mortal risk; violation of another person's freedom, dignity, or identity; the illegal practice of medicine or pharmacology; false advertising; and fraud or falsification.

For historical reasons, the Jewish, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace and Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these religious groups. Adherents of these four religious groups may choose to have a portion of their income tax allocated to their religious organization in a system administered by the central Government.

Central or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before the 1905 law separating religion and state. In Alsace and Moselle, special laws allow the local governments to provide support for the building of religious edifices. The Government partially funded the establishment of the country's oldest Islamic house of worship, the Paris Grand Mosque, in 1926.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from visa requirements to enter the country must obtain a three-month tourist visa before leaving their own country. All missionaries who wish to remain in the country longer than ninety days must obtain visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must apply with the local prefecture for a carte de sejour (a document that allows a foreigner to remain in the country for a given period of time) and must provide the prefecture a letter from their sponsoring religious organization.

Public schools are secular. In March 2004, the Government passed legislation prohibiting public school employees and students from wearing conspicuous religious symbols, including the Muslim headscarf, the Jewish skullcap, and large crosses; the legislation took effect at the beginning of the school year in September 2004. Religious instruction is not given in public schools, but facts about religions are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may home-school children for religious reasons, but all schooling must conform to the standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions. The Government subsidizes private schools, including those that are affiliated with religious organizations.

The Government has made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. Denial of crimes against humanity is illegal. The Government has programs to combat racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns and through encouraging dialogue among local officials, police, and citizen groups. Government leaders, along with representatives from the Jewish community, the Paris and Marseille Grand Mosques, the Protestant Federation, and the French Conference of Bishops have publicly condemned racist and anti-Semitic violence. In 2003, a law was passed against crimes of a "racist, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic" nature; the law classifies racist motivations for violent acts as aggravating circumstances and mandates harsher punishment for these crimes. March 2004 legislation further increased pun-

ishment 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 sixteen churches and sixty associations. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community. It also acts as an interlocutor with the Government.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, includes the Jewish "worship associations" from the entire country. It acts as a liaison with the Government, trains rabbis, and responds to other needs of the Jewish community. In 1943, Jewish members of the French Resistance formed the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF). The CRIF's mission is to fight anti-Semitism, preserve the memory of the Holocaust, affirm solidarity with Israel, and promote peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The national French Council of the Muslim Faith and twenty-five 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 November 2004, then-Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin announced the creation of a Foundation for French 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 French language, history, and civics; however, it suffers from a lack of foreign or private funding. The Government's goal was to establish the organization, with funding to come from the members. Government interest in the project could be flagging because of a change in ministers.

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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, visited the country in September 2005 and issued a report on her findings in March 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. Regarding the 1905 law separating church and state, the special rapporteur recognized that while the law guarantees in principle the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief, she stated that "in some circumstances, the selective interpretation and rigid application of this principle has operated at the expense" of religious freedom. The special rapporteur considered that "the policy of the Government may have contributed to a climate of general suspicion and intolerance" towards religious groups listed in a 1995 parliamentary report as "cults." She noted that authorities had "adopted a more balanced approach" in recent years towards groups considered cults and judged that MIVILUDES was an improvement over the anti-cult organization it replaced in 2002. However, the special rapporteur added that because of staffing changes after she completed her visit, "MIVILUDES was allegedly about to return to a more hard-line position" regarding alternative and minority religions. The special rapporteur found that, while the March 2004 law banning the wearing of religions symbols in schools can "protect the autonomy of minors who may be pressured or forced to wear a headscarf or other religious symbols," it also acted to deny the rights of "minors who have freely chosen to wear a religious symbol to school as a part of their religious belief," and that "the stigmatization of the headscarf has provoked acts of religious intolerance when women wear it outside school."

In March 2004, on the recommendation of an inter-ministerial commission established by the president to study secularism, integration, and the place of religion in the country, the Government passed a law prohibiting the wearing of "conspicuous" religious symbols—including Muslim headscarves, Jewish skullcaps, and large crosses—by employees and students in public schools. In June 2004, the European Commission on Human Rights ruled that the law did not violate the freedom of religion; the law was implemented in September 2004. Some Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh leaders, human rights groups, and foreign governments voiced concerns about the law's potential to restrict religious freedom. Following the enactment of the law, media reports indicated that Muslim girls and Sikh boys had been expelled from public school for violating this law; all had reportedly enrolled in private schools, distance education courses, or schools abroad. One Muslim group, however, indicated that the law adversely affected many more Muslim girls, whether

by causing them to seek alternative educational options or requiring them to remove their veil. Media reports estimated that, of the 13 million schoolchildren, approximately 1,200 Muslim school-aged girls wore veils. The Sikh community reported that, of the roughly 200 school-aged Sikh boys, 84 percent were affected by the legislation.

In 2005, the Paris Court of Appeals rejected a telemarketing firm's appeal of a 2003 ruling in favor of a young woman who sought reinstatement, damages, and interest after she was fired by the telemarketing firm for refusing to wear her headscarf in a manner deemed appropriate by her employer.

Some Muslim and Sikh groups protested the government policy prohibiting the wearing of head coverings in national identity photos. A case brought before the country's highest court for administrative matters by a Sikh wishing to be permitted to wear his turban in driver's license and passport photos was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. The Sikhs, who lost the case in March 2006, filed complaints with the French High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality, and with the European Commission, for indirect discrimination against individuals and a group of individuals in contravention of various European laws.

In July 2004, Parliament passed a law permitting the expulsion of individuals for "inciting discrimination, hatred or violence against a specific person or group of persons." Abdelkader Bouziane, an imam, was deported from the country in October 2004, accused of publicly justifying wife-beating in an article.

The Government continued to encourage public caution toward some minority religions that it considers "cults." Mass suicides in 1994 by members of the Order of the Solar Temple led to heightened public concern about "cult" behavior. In 1996, a parliamentary commission studying so-called 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. In May 2005, then-Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin issued a circular indicating that the parliamentary list should no longer be used to identify "sects" and directed authorities to focus their efforts instead on those sects that represent the greatest threat, notably those "small, fluid" groups that are "less easily identifiable" and that use the Internet for recruitment. Some religious groups hailed the move as a step forward but called for the Ministry of Justice to issue a circular to rescind repressive measures against minority religions.

On April 16, 2006, MIVILUDES published its report for 2005, noting continued concern about the activities of groups it considers "cults." According to MIVILUDES President Jean-Michel Roulet, "There are real and good reasons not to give up the fight against sectarian abuses on the fallacious grounds that this represents an attack on the freedom of religion." The 176-page report cited three primary areas of concern: Protecting children from cult influences, both from parents who may be involved in the groups and from attempts by groups to recruit young members; curing demand for "alternative medicines" and spiritual healers; and preventing sects' use of natural disasters and humanitarian aid to promote their public image and proselytize their beliefs. The report specifically cited the Church of Scientology as being present in France's suburbs following last fall's unrest there, distributing copies of their booklet "The Path of Happiness" and reaching out to youth. Minority religious groups indicated that the allegations in the report were unsubstantiated and often false, adding to public mistrust of the organizations involved. Groups also expressed concern about comments made by Roulet, often specifically citing the Church of Scientology, and promising to increase efforts against minority religions.

In January 2005, MIVILUDES published a guide for public servants instructing them how to spot and combat "dangerous" sects. In several instances, the law regarding the right of patients to refuse medical treatment, as well as subsequent court decisions, was noted. The Jehovah's Witnesses were mentioned as an organization that refused blood transfusions, and there was mention of Health Ministry guidance to encourage treatment while respecting patient wishes. Some groups expressed concern that this guide would be misused by overzealous public servants against legitimate religious organizations.

Some observers remained concerned about the 2001 About-Picard law, which permits the dissolution of religious groups, if it is established that group practices are believed to violate basic rights. In 2002, the Council of Europe passed a resolution critical of the law and invited the Government to reconsider it. The law remained in force. Although the provisions allowing for the dissolution of groups have never been applied, another aspect of the law was utilized for the first time against the

leader of a "cult." Arnaud Mussy, the founder and spiritual head of the group Neo-Phare, was convicted in November 2004 of fraudulent abuse of the state of ignorance and the weakness of four followers. Mussy claimed to be the reincarnation of Christ and made several predictions in 2000 regarding the pending apocalypse; one of his adherents killed himself, and two other followers attempted suicide allegedly because of their states of mind brought on by Mussy's manipulation. He appealed the decision.

On June 28, 2006, the National Assembly passed a law creating a Commission of Enquiry Regarding the Influence of Sects on Minors, the third parliamentary commission in eleven years set up to investigate sects. According to the sponsors of the bill, the committee would seek to investigate both the "insidious means" by which sects seek to proselytize youth, as well as any resultant negative effects on young people's physical and psychological well-being.

Representatives of the Church of Scientology continued to report cases of societal discrimination, frivolous lawsuits, and prosecution for allegedly fraudulent activity. In 2003, the Court of Appeals of Paris fined the Paris-region Spiritual Association of the Church of Scientology approximately $6,100 (5,000 euros) for breaking a law on information privacy; the decision was appealed. Church of Scientology representatives reported that a case filed by a parent whose child attended an "Applied Scholastics"-based school was resolved when the young woman, previously prevented by the Government from leaving the country to attend the school abroad, decided she would wait until she reached the age of eighteen and could legally make the decision herself. In March 2004, the police intelligence agency, Renseignements Generaux (RG), was instructed by the Administrative Tribunal of Paris to comply with a 2003 decision by the Council of State to provide the Church of Scientology with its files on the group, or be fined. The RG had refused to accede to the Church of Scientology's request since 2000, citing "public safety" concerns.

The Church of Scientology also argued that numerous remarks by Jean-Michel Roulet, since his October 2005 installation as the president of MIVILUDES, were "rife with false and derogatory information...[which] makes it impossible for MIVILUDES to function in an objective and neutral manner." Scientology representatives characterized Mr. Roulet's statements as "a return to discriminatory government policies...designed to...stigmatize and denigrate targeted minority faiths in France." In addition, they criticized his February 2006 letter to France's Superior Audiovisual Council (CSA in French), which alerted CSA authorities that a public service announcement that had been broadcast on French television had in fact been provided by the Youth for Human Rights International (YHRI), which is affiliated with the Church of Scientology. After receipt of Roulet's letter, according to the Scientologists, the CSA acted to censor the public service announcements by warning stations of their origin (the link between YHRI and Scientology is clear on the website indicated on the website address provided on the box containing the DVD of the PSA). The Scientologist's attorney pointed out that this type of censorship had occurred only in France.

Scientologists in the country reported many other cases of discrimination. In one, the spokesperson for the Church in the country, Danielle Gounord, was summoned to appear before the police on January 31, 2006, and told that the magistrate who headed the "Sect Mission" within the Justice Ministry's Department of Criminal Affairs and Pardon had filed a report claiming harassment against her. The Magistrate, Marie-Jose Aube Lotte, based her claim of harassment on letters received from Gounord, on an article Gounord wrote, and on a question that Gounord posed to Lotte at a seminar in the Senate. According to the Scientologist's attorney, in no case had Gounord said, done, or written anything in contravention of any law.

On December 14, 2005, a Paris court rejected a lawsuit brought by a collective of associations asking for the dissolution of the National Union of Associations for the Defense of the Family (UNADFI). The organizations accused UNADFI, a state-subsidized NGO "specializing in information about sects," of regularly overstepping its informative role and acting against religious freedom. Instead, the court ruled that the suit constituted an "abusive procedure" and ordered the plaintiffs to pay UNADFI $18,000 (15,000 euros) in damage and court costs and ordered the plaintiffs to print the decision in eight newspapers. The plaintiffs planned to appeal the decision.

Some observers voiced concerns about the tax authorities' scrutiny of the financial records of some religious groups. In October 2004, the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses lost their appeal to the Court of Cassation on a 2002 ruling that they must pay back taxes currently totaling nearly $51,135,000 (40,908,000 euros). The members claimed that they were discriminatorily and punitively audited because of their classification as a cult, because of their placement on the 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. On February 25, 2005, the case was submitted to the European Court of Human Rights and was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

Jehovah's Witnesses in the Vosges Department reported difficulty gaining permission to build a house of worship in the town of Deyvilliers, and at the end of a reporting period a court case was pending before an administrative court. Jehovah's Witnesses also reported several acts of vandalism, including the burning of a car and the arson of a house of worship. On December 1, 2005, the Paris Court of Appeal overturned a 2001 decision and ordered the Ministry of Interior to turn over to the Jehovah's Witnesses documents relating to the 1996 parliamentary report and to pay $1,800 (1,500 euros) for costs. The Ministry of Interior's appeal of the decision 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 minor U.S. citizens who had 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 February 13, 2005, the first death linked to anti-Semitism since 1995 occurred when authorities discovered the beaten and burned body of Ilan Halimi, a twenty-three-year-old Jewish man who was kidnapped and tortured to death by a gang in the southern Paris suburb of Bagneux. Halimi was approached by a young woman at his place of work and kidnapped when he went to meet her on January 20. One of the suspects in custody for the crime admitted to authorities that Halimi had been targeted "because he is Jewish, and because Jews are rich." The gang, which referred to themselves as "The Barbarians," demanded as much as $600,000 (500,000 euros) for his release and reportedly told his family to "ask synagogues for the money" when told that the family did not have enough money. The gang leader and self-proclaimed "Brain of the Barbarians," Youssef Fofana, fled to Cote d'Ivoire shortly after Halimi's body was discovered and was later extradited to France. At the end of the reporting period at least twenty-one persons, including Fofana and the woman who lured Halimi, were in custody or awaiting charges for the kidnapping and killing of Halimi, which was classified by the Justice Ministry as a hate crime bearing the "aggravated circumstance of anti-Semitism."

Authorities reacted strongly to Halimi's killing, although some members of Halimi's family accused the police of moving too slowly and initially disregarding the anti-Semitic dimension of the crime. President Jacques Chirac, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, opposition political figures, and Muslim and Christian religious leaders attended a memorial for Ilan Halimi February 24 at a Paris synagogue. Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, and European Minister Catherine Colonna were among the estimated 33,000–200,000 people who attended a February 26 march organized by the CRIF and NGOs SOS-Racisme and the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA) to honor Halimi and show solidarity against racism and anti-Semitism.

Following the Halimi killing there was a spate of anti-Semitic incidents in the Parisian suburb of Sarcelles, where Jews make up approximately 20 percent of the 58,000 residents. According to press reports, the perpetrators in these incidents were of sub-Saharan African and Maghreb origin. On March 3, 2006 a local rabbi's seventeen-year-old son was attacked by two men of African origin near a synagogue, suffering a broken nose. That same day, an eighteen-year-old man was assaulted by a group of five men, who insulted him and stole his cell phone. On March 4, a twenty-eight-year-old man was attacked by four assailants, suffering a dislocated shoulder. The four responsible for the attack were arrested. Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy met with the families of all three victims, calling anti-Semitism "a stain on the national flag" and announcing a reinforcement of local police forces and video surveillance in the area.

In July 2005, three youths threw bottles of acid into the courtyard of a Jewish school in Paris. No injuries were reported. The three minors were released into judicial custody, and their trial remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

In April 2005, the CRIF condemned the sale of anti-Semitic cassettes by the Committee for the Well-being and Rescue for Palestinians at the annual meeting of the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF). The president of the UOIF called

the situation "regrettable" and lamented that the situation had not been brought to his attention earlier, so as to prevent the dissemination. He stated, "We cannot tolerate the sale of such cassettes, this is an incitation to racial hatred, an incitation against religions. This is unacceptable."

In November 2004, a group of students visiting Auschwitz were accused of inappropriate behavior, including running, throwing snowballs, smiling next to pictures of deportees, and in the case of one student, making comments that approved of the Nazis' actions. In January 2005, an appeals court rejected the appeals of two of the disciplined students, upholding the permanent expulsion for the student who made the remarks, and confirming a fifteen-day suspension for another student.

In October 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called comments by Radio France International editor Alain Menargues "unacceptable." Menargues called Israel a "racist" state while publicizing his book on the West Bank security barrier. As a result of the controversy surrounding his remarks, Menargues resigned.

In October 2004, Bruno Gollnisch, a part-time university professor in Lyon, member of the European Parliament, and vice president of the extreme-right National Front, made several comments regarding the Holocaust to the media, questioning the use of gas chambers and stating, "I'm not contesting the existence of concentration camps, but as for the number of dead, historians might want to debate on it." In March 2005, the disciplinary committee at the university where he was teaching banned him from teaching there for five years for contesting crimes against humanity; on May 22, the National Council of Higher Education's disciplinary committee confirmed the expulsion. On May 23, Gollnisch's trial on charges of contesting crimes against humanity was postponed until November 7. The European Parliament lifted Gollnisch's parliamentary immunity on December 13, 2005.

On Sunday May 28, 2006, approximately thirty young men marched down a symbolically significant street in Paris' traditional Jewish quarter yelling "death to the Jews" and other anti-Semitic insults. The men, of African origin, were seeking a confrontation with members of the Betar youth movement and the Jewish Defense League. The incident lasted an estimated fifteen minutes. Although there was no violence, many Jewish residents and shopkeepers in the area complained of intimidation. The National Office of Vigilance against Anti-Semitism filed a complaint with police, who opened an investigation. The gang warned it would return every Sunday but had not returned again in the period covered by this report.

The men were believed to belong to Tribu KA, a thirty-member group of extremist blacks, created in 2004 and known to police for their racist rhetoric against Jews and whites. Its leader, Stellio Gilles Robert, a former member of the Nation of Islam in Paris under the name Kemi Seba, was indicted in the past on charges of public slander and incitement to racial hatred. The day after the attack, Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy wrote a letter to the minister of justice seeking an order to ban the group's Internet site, and the site was down two days later. The day after the incidents, Sarkozy received the president of CRIF and some area shopkeepers. The Socialist Party condemned the intimidations of the Tribu KA and called on authorities to get to the bottom of the events.

Sarkozy visited the area on May 31, 2006, proclaiming, "I don't want a single Jew to be afraid here. The fear of a single Jew is a stain on the French flag." Sarkozy announced that police were undertaking two investigations into the incident. He also noted he had asked legal experts to study how Tribu KA could be dissolved and reinforced patrols in the neighborhood.

Another interior ministry official stated during a June 4 interview that Sarkozy would seek to have the group sanctioned. However, a press report from mid-June suggested that investigators have were not able to find evidence (from videotapes and witnesses) that the gang members actually committed anti-Semitic acts or said anything that would be actionable under the law.

Also in June, the administrative tribunal of Toulouse convicted the French state and the state railways, the SNCF, for its 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 in spring 1944 from Pau to the transit camp of Drancy, north of Paris. (The family was ultimately liberated.) In its judgment, the court declared that "The French administration could not manifestly ignore that their transfer...facilitated an operation that would normally have been the prelude to the deportation of the concerned persons." The SNCF, which was ordered to pay $74,400 (62,000 euros) to the Lipietz family, said it will appeal the decision.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government has taken a number of proactive steps to fight anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attacks, including instructing police commissioners to create monitoring units in each department and creating a department-level Council of Religions to

raise public awareness of increased racial and sectarian assaults and other incidents. The number of racist and anti-Semitic incidents reported by the Government in 2005 was down 38 percent over those in 2004. In late 2003, the Ministry of Education created a national commission to combat anti-Semitism in schools, and the Government continued efforts to promote tolerance and combat racism and anti-Semitism throughout the reporting period. In August 2004, the Mayor of Paris sent letters to all Paris-area principals calling for "debates on anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination" when classes resumed in September.

Rabbi Michel Serfaty, co-president of the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association (AJMF), received positive responses to his June 2005 tour of Jewish and Muslim leaders throughout the country to promote dialogue between the two communities. As a result, Rabbi Serfaty followed up with a tour of the Paris region in April and another country-wide tour in May.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a number of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents during the period covered by this report. The Council of Christian Churches in France is composed of three Protestant, three Catholic, and three Orthodox Christian representatives. It serves as a forum for dialogue among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialogue among the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish communities, which discusses and issues statements on various national and international themes.

In 2004, the Government released the Rufin Report, which concluded that racism and anti-Semitism were a threat to French democracy and that anti-Semitic acts are not only carried out by elements of the extreme right and Muslim youth of North African descent, but also by "disaffected individuals" whose anti-Semitic obsessions prompt their attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions. The Rufin Report also warned against radical anti-Zionists who question Israel's right to exist. The report recommended that a law be created to punish those publicly equating Israel with apartheid or Nazi Germany. Additionally, the report 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 websites and to work closely with authorities to prosecute offenders.

In a March 2006 annual report to the prime minister, the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (NCCHR) indicated that there were 974 racist and anti-Semitic incidents in 2005, a drop of 38 percent from the 1,574 recorded in 2004. The number of anti-Semitic incidents—including physical assaults, attacks against property, cemetery desecrations, threats, and reported insults—decreased 48 percent, from 974 in 2004 to 504 in 2005. The NCCHR also indicated that the decrease in anti-Semitic incidents extended into the schools, an area that has been of great concern in recent years. According to Ministry of Interior figures, the number of racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic incidents in schools dropped by 54 percent in 2005, with the number of anti-Semitic incidents seeing the greatest decrease. The Ministry of Education likewise reported a 30 percent reduction in incidents of intolerance.

The NCCHR report noted that the number of anti-Semitic threats and insults committed by those of "Arab-Muslim" background dropped from 429 in 2004 to 99 in 2005, a decrease of 77 percent, and comprised 24 percent of the total. The number of threats and insults committed by the extreme right remained relatively stable (148 in 2005 as opposed to 152 in 2004) and made up 36 percent of the incidents recorded. Authorities were unable to identify the perpetrators of anti-Semitic violence in 47 percent of the cases. Individuals of "Arab-Muslim" background were responsible for 41 percent of violent incidents while members of the extreme-right were culpable for 10 percent.

The NCCHR report stated, "despite the efforts deployed to fight racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, there is still a long way to go." Specifically, the NCCHR noted a "lifting of the taboo" against racist attitudes, as evidenced by polls indicating that one in three citizens admits to being at least "a little" racist, up from 25 percent in the 2004 report. In its list of recommendations, the NCCHR encouraged the Government to continue efforts to fight racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, particularly as they were disseminated on the Internet.

Judging that French society historically had "perhaps not been vigilant enough in the face of racism and anti-Semitism," Justice Minister Pascal Clement announced that French courts handed down 434 convictions for racist and anti-Semitic crimes in 2005, a 43 percent increase over the 303 convictions recorded in 2004. The rise in convictions, the minister noted, was not due to a rise in incidents, but rather to "better pursuit" of the acts that did occur. Additionally, prosecutors were under orders to seek maximum punishments in hate crimes and to systematically appeal sentences not considered strong enough.

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 in the NCCHR's 2005 annual report. Based on its own information and that of the Jewish Community Protection Service, CRIF registered 252 anti-Semitic incidents during the first ten months of 2005, as opposed to 484 during the same period of time in 2004. CRIF stated in the NCCHR report that its figures do not always correspond to those of the Government, as victims do not always report their attacks to both the police and CRIF. CRIF also noted its concern about the availability of anti-Semitic diffusions via the Internet, the radio, and satellite television.

Authorities met with international organizations to discuss efforts to fight anti-Semitism. Representatives of the American Jewish Committee made several trips during the reporting period to consult with officials and expressed support for government efforts. President Chirac declared his "absolute determination" to fight anti-Semitism in a May 2, 2006, meeting with members of the UJA-Federation of New York, who also discussed the issue with the ministers of justice and the interior.

In 2003, after an arson attack destroyed a Jewish school in Gagny, President Chirac stated "an attack on a Jew is an attack on France" and ordered the formation of an interministerial committee charged with leading an effort to combat anti-Semitism. Since its first meeting in 2003, the committee has worked to improve government coordination in the fight against anti-Semitism, including the timely publication of statistics and reinforced efforts to prosecute attackers.

Authorities condemned anti-Semitic attacks, maintained heightened security at Jewish institutions, investigated the attacks, made arrests, and pursued prosecutions. More than thirteen mobile units, totaling more than 1,200 police officers, were assigned to those locales with the largest Jewish communities. Fixed or mobile police were present in the schools, particularly during the hours when children were entering or leaving school buildings. All of these measures were coordinated closely with leaders of the Jewish communities in the country, notably CRIF.

The Government took other steps to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance, particularly among young people; however, some groups asserted that the judicial system was lax in its sentencing of anti-Semitic offenders. 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.

The Government has taken other proactive steps to fight anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attacks, including instructing police commissioners to create monitoring units in each national department and announcing in June 2004 the creation of a department-level Council of Religions to raise public awareness of increased racial and anti-sectarian incidents. In September 2004, the mayor of Paris launched a campaign to fight all forms of intolerance that included 1,200 municipal billboards and bulletins in major newspapers.

Members of the Arab-Muslim community experienced incidents of harassment and vandalism. However, the situation improved in 2005, during which, according to the NCCHR, there were 470 racist acts recorded, a decrease of 22 percent from the 600 committed in 2004. Of these, the drop was most profoundly noted in the number of violent incidents (88 in 2005 as opposed to 169 in 2004). More than half of the racist incidents (257) were attributed to far-right extremists. However, violent racist incidents on the island of Corsica, which made up 48 percent of the attacks in 2004, comprised only 27 percent of the incidents in 2005.

Attacks in Corsica were often blamed on elements of the island's nationalist movement, and many incidents involved graffiti with such slogans as "Arabs Out" and "Corsica for the Corsicans" written in the Corsican language. On January 18, 2006, a bomb exploded outside a Muslim-owned butcher shop in the Corsican capitol of Ajaccio, the fourth such attack against the same shop. No one claimed responsibility for the attack. In November 2004, assailants opened fire on an imam as he answered a knock at the door of the Muslim Cultural Association of Sartene, in southern Corsica. The imam was uninjured. In that same month, police placed fourteen members of the nationalist group Clandestini Corsi under investigation. In December 2004, there were two attacks against a building that houses immigrants. Also in that month, Corsican authorities held a week of events aimed at increasing

awareness of the danger of racism and promoting co-existence between immigrant and native Corsican populations. The attacks caused some families to move to the mainland or return to their countries of origin.

On November 11, 2005, a mosque near Lyon was attacked with little damage reported. On November 13 and 14, two firebomb attacks were attempted against the Grand Mosque of Lyon. On November 20, a mosque in the eastern town of Fougeres was hit with two firebombs, but no one was injured, and the main prayer room was not damaged. Political and religious leaders condemned the attacks, and authorities actively investigated the incidents. Many suspected the attacks might have been committed by right-wing militants in response to the unrest occurring nightly at the time.

Negative societal attitudes regarding the wearing of Muslim headscarves might have led to incidents of discrimination against Muslim women. Members of the Muslim community alleged that, when wearing headscarves, they were refused service by private businesses. Media reports indicated that some companies discouraged women employees from wearing the headscarf or encouraged them to wear a bandanna in its place.

Authorities cracked down on efforts by small groups linked to the extreme right responsible for distributing "identity soup" made with pork, which is forbidden to those observing kosher or halal diets, to the homeless. Police shut down efforts to distribute the soup once it was determined to contain pork, and in January the city of Strasbourg banned the practice as a threat to public order. "Schemes with racial subtexts must be denounced," announced the mayor of Strasbourg.

In 2004, a court handed down a four-month suspended sentence and a $13,624 (10,000 euros) fine to a woman who refused to sell property to an Arab couple.

Cemeteries and religious sites were often targets of attack; the Interior Ministry announced desecrations and destructive acts at ninety-two Christian, thirty-one Jewish, and twenty-eight Muslim sites in 2004. Many of these incidents occurred in Alsace, where extreme-right groups have ties to similar groups across the border in Germany. In January 2006, two individuals were arrested and charged with the April 29, 2004, desecration of 127 tombs in a Jewish cemetery in Herrlisheim, near the German border. An accomplice, a member of the extreme-right political party the National Front, was previously arrested in December 2004. Emmanuel Rist, one of the two arrested for the defamation, and another individual were also charged with a September 8, 2005, explosion that injured Benemar Lhabib, a sixty-five-year-old Moroccan. A letter following the bombing claimed responsibility and called for a "Nordic-Aryan" Alsace. In May 2005, approximately sixty gravestones were smashed and a swastika drawn on a door of a Jewish cemetery in Sarreguemines (eastern France) shortly after the memorial service for the town's Holocaust victims had been held. Two young vandals, aged fourteen and twelve, were caught and confessed to having committed the act "out of foolishness."

On May 18, 2006, the Government approved a ministry of interior decision to disband the neo-Nazi group Elsass Korps. The dissolution would prevent the group from meeting publicly and punish individuals found to be reconstituting the group under a different name.

In May 2005, a Versailles court of appeals found the authors and publisher of a 2002 article titled "Israel-Palestine: The Cancer" guilty of "racial defamation" for anti-Semitic content. Journalists Edgar Morin, Daniele Sallenave, and Sami Nair, as well as editor Jean-Marie Colombani were ordered to pay the legal fees of the prosecuting groups and $1.20 (1 euro) each in damages. The publishing newspaper, Le Monde, was ordered to print a retraction. The decision was controversial, particularly as one of the authors, Edgar Morin, was Jewish. A judge dismissed the initial complaint, ruling that any reasonable reader would not equate criticism of then-Israeli Prime Minister Sharon and his supporters as an attack on all Jews, but an appeals court found that three sentences in the article violated a 1990 antiracism law.

In June 2005, a Paris court ordered French Internet service providers (ISPs) to block the website of the French revisionist organization Association of Former Connoisseurs of War and Holocaust Stories (AAARGH) to French viewers. Two of three U.S. ISPs agreed to stop hosting AAARGH's website.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Representatives from the embassy 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 reg-

ularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved in the issue. The embassy maintained regular contact with the representative bodies that comprise the French Council of the Muslim Faith and visits mosques run by the various organizations as part of its promotion of religious freedom and Muslim outreach efforts. In December 2005, the embassy and the Paris-based representative of the American Jewish Committee organized a meeting between the ambassador and leading Jewish intellectuals and educators to examine the relationship between anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in France. In May, the ambassador co-hosted with the ambassadors of Great Britain, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia a screening of the film "The Power of Good," which detailed the efforts of Sir Nicolas Winton to save 669 children from Nazi extermination during World War II, as part of the embassy's efforts to promote religious tolerance. The embassy facilitated the visits of American Members of Congress and Congressional Commissions, as well as Congressional staff members and representatives from other government agencies, to discuss religious freedom issues with religious leaders and senior government officials.

GEORGIA

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

During the period covered by this report, the status of religious freedom continued to improve. Beginning in July 2005 the Government approved the registration applications of previously unregistered religious groups, pursuant to a new law enabling religious groups to operate more freely. A total of fourteen organizations subsequently registered under the law. Police were generally more responsive to the needs of minority religious groups but failed at times to adequately protect them. In December 2005 numerous members of Parliament (MPs) objected strongly to a report by the government ombudsman calling for equal recognition under the law of all religious groups. The MPs stated that the historical role of the Georgian Orthodox Church justified its privileged position.

Citizens generally did not interfere with religious groups considered to be "traditional"; however, there was widespread suspicion of "nontraditional" ones. Attacks on religious minorities, including violence, verbal harassment, and disruption of services and meetings, continued to decrease. While the Prosecutor General's Office increasingly initiated investigations of religious-based violence, past complaints remained unresolved.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 25,900 square miles, and its population is an estimated 4.4 million. Most ethnic Georgians (who constituted more than 80 percent of the population, according to the 2002 census) at least nominally associated themselves with the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC). According to common Orthodox practice, Orthodox churches serving non-Georgian ethnic groups, such as Russians, Armenians, and Greeks, are under the territorial jurisdiction of the GOC. Non-Georgian Orthodox churches generally use the language of their communicants. There remained a small number of mostly ethnic Russian adherents from three dissident Orthodox schools—the Molokani, Staroveriy (Old Believers), and Dukhoboriy (Spirit Wrestlers). Under Soviet rule, the number of active churches and priests declined sharply, and religious education was nearly nonexistent. Membership in the GOC has continued to increase since independence in 1991. The Church maintained four theological seminaries, two academies, several schools, and twenty-seven dioceses; it had approximately 700 priests, 250 monks, and 150 nuns. The Church was headed by Catholicos Patriarch Ilia II; the patriarchate was located in the capital, Tbilisi.

The Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC), Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam traditionally coexisted with Georgian Orthodoxy. Some religious groups were correlated with ethnicity. Azeris comprised the second largest ethnic group (approximately 285 thousand, 7 percent of the population) and were largely Muslim; most lived in the southeastern region of Kvemo-Kartli, where they constituted a majority. Armenians were the third largest ethnic group (estimated at 249 thousand, 6 percent of the population), comprising the majority in the southern Samtskhe-Javakheti region. Armenians largely belonged to the AAC.

Approximately 9.9 percent of the population was at least nominally Muslim. There were three main Muslim populations: Ethnic Azeris, ethnic Georgian Muslims of Ajara, and ethnic Chechen Kists in the northeastern region. There were four large madrassahs (Muslim religious schools) attached to mosques in the eastern region, two of which were Shi'ite and financed by Iranian religious groups, and two of which, financed by Turkish religious groups, were Sunni. There were also several smaller madrassahs in Ajara that were financed by private groups in Turkey.

The Armenian Apostolic Church comprised the third largest religious group, with members constituting an estimated 3.9 percent of the population. Each of the other religious groups constituted less than 1 percent of the population.

There were approximately thirty-five thousand Catholics, largely ethnic Georgians or Assyrians. A small number of Kurdish Yezidis—an estimated eighteen thousand—have lived in the country for centuries. The ethnic Greek Orthodox community used to number more than one hundred thousand, but emigration waves since independence reduced its numbers to approximately fifteen thousand.

Judaism, which has been present since ancient times, was practiced in a number of communities throughout the country, particularly in the largest cities, Tbilisi and Kutaisi. Approximately ten thousand Jews remained in the country following two large waves of emigration, the first in the early 1970s and the second during perestroyka in the late 1980s. Before then, officials estimate that there were approximately forty thousand Jews.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Protestant and other nontraditional denominations have become more active and prominent. Local Jehovah's Witnesses' representatives stated that the group had approximately 16 thousand adherents locally and had been in the country since 1953. Pentecostals, both ethnic Georgian and Russian, were estimated to number nine thousand. Baptists—composed of ethnic Russian, Georgian, Armenian, Ossetian, and Kurdish groups—totaled an estimated eight thousand adherents.

There were fewer than one thousand Lutherans, mostly descendents of German communities that settled in the country several hundred years ago. Seventh-day Adventists claimed approximately 350 members, and the New Apostolic Church was also present. Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was small. There also were a few Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and Buddhists. The membership of all these groups combined was officially estimated at thirty-four thousand persons. The number of atheists who openly declare themselves as such was less than 1 percent of the population.

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; however, local officials and police sometimes denied this right or protection to religious minorities. 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. In 2002 a constitutional agreement (concordat) between the Government and the GOC was signed and ratified by Parliament. The concordat recognizes the special role of the GOC and devolves authority over all religious matters to it, including matters outside the church including public education topics.

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 president and government ombudsman have been effective advocates for religious freedom and have made numerous public speeches and appearances in support of minority religious groups. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) have become more active in the protection of religious freedom but sometimes have failed to pursue criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for previous attacks against religious minorities. The human rights unit in the legal department of the PGO is charged with protecting human rights, including religious freedom. Since the beginning of 2005 the PGO has initiated twenty-eight investigations of religious-based violence, which have resulted in the trial and conviction of seven individuals.

The GOC remains very active in the restoration of religious facilities, and it lobbies the Government for the return of properties that were held by the Church before the country's incorporation into the Soviet Union (church authorities have

claimed that 20 to 30 percent of the country's land area at one time belonged to the church). In September 2005 the Government returned three additional properties to the GOC.

In November 2005 President Saakashvili ordered the return of a mosque in the Kvemo-Kartli region, which had been seized earlier and converted into a community hall.

The country celebrates all Orthodox holy days. In March 2006 President Saakashvili attended the celebration of the Muslim holy day Navrus Bairam in Marneuli, and in November 2005 he participated in a celebration of the Muslim holy day Bairam at a mosque in Tbilisi.

Before a registration process was established by Parliament in April 2005, religious groups were required to register as public entities, even though the law provided no mechanism to do so yet stipulated a fine for any unregistered religious group. Religious groups may now register as local associations or foundations. An association 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). Registration must be granted or denied within fifteen days of application; a refusal may be appealed in court.

In July 2005 the MOJ approved the first applications filed under the new registration process. Both the Foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Georgia (Mormons) and the Representation of the International Agency of Adventist Development and Assistance in Georgia (which is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church) received approval in less time than the fifteen days allowed by law. An additional twelve organizations subsequently registered under the law. The MOJ suspended a notary public for one year after she refused to notarize documents of a Pentecostal church that the church needed for registration; the congregation was seeking registration at the end of the reporting period. Officials at the MOJ were responsive in providing advice to religious organizations on preparing registration applications and supporting documentation.

Some religious communities expressed dissatisfaction with the status that registration provided. The Catholic Church (RCC) and the AAC opposed registering themselves as civil organizations. Other churches such as the Baptists expressed concern that transfers of property to their churches would then be taxable.

In November 2005 Jehovah's Witnesses rented a hall in Rustavi to conduct meetings. On November 3, 2005, Paata Bluashvili, the leader of the Orthodox group Jvari, and members of the group threatened the owner of the meeting hall, who then cancelled the contract with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Bluashvili was convicted in 2004 of interfering with a religious service and given a two-year suspended sentence. Pending investigation of the November incident, Bluashvili was sentenced to pretrial detention. Upon Bluashvili's appeal of the three-month detention, a court of appeals overturned the sentence and released him, pending trial. In April 2006 a Rustavi court reinstated the three-month sentence. Bluashvili failed to appear at the April hearing and was wanted by the authorities.

While Jehovah's Witnesses no longer believed 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 Kingdom Halls.

Despite a law on education passed in April 2005 that forbids religious indoctrination, proselytizing, forced assimilation, or the teaching of theology in public schools during school hours, in practice students routinely received instruction in Orthodox Christian theology. Teachers often began most courses, including mathematics and science, by leading the class in a recitation of Orthodox prayers. Those students who did not participate were sometimes punished. The law also forbids the display of religious symbols on a public school's grounds unless the purpose is academic. In many classrooms, however, teachers hung orthodox icons or pictures of GOC religious figures. Some schools have Orthodox chapels where students were encouraged to pray.

Public schools offered an elective course, "Religion in Society." This course, however, dealt exclusively with the theology of Orthodox Christianity. Moreover, while the course was an elective, there was societal pressure for students to take it. The primary textbook approved for use in the course focused on Orthodox Christianity to the exclusion of other faiths. The Ministry of Education (MOE) continued to work on curriculum development for this course.

Students are allowed to study religion and conduct religious rituals after school hours; neither a teacher nor any other outside party, such as a priest, may participate unless invited by the students. Prayers and other rituals may no longer be conducted during school hours.

The GOC routinely reviews religious and other textbooks used in schools for consistency with Orthodox beliefs. By law the church has a consultative role in curriculum development but no veto power.

Pursuant to a memorandum signed by the GOC patriarchate and the MOE in January 2005, a joint working group began reviewing options for the elective course on religion in society and other matters related to religion in the curriculum. In the memorandum, the ministry also agreed to financially assist the church in its education projects and institutions and to include the Church in the development of new material for religious education. No other religious groups were afforded these privileges.

Senior government officials, including the speaker of Parliament, and opposition party leaders intervened when the public television station declined to broadcast live a Christmas Eve church service. The service was broadcast following the intervention.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The 2002 concordat between the GOC and the state defines relations between the two. The GOC enjoys tax-exempt status not available to other religious groups. The concordat contained several controversial articles: Giving the patriarch immunity, granting the Church the exclusive right to staff the military chaplaincy, exempting GOC clergymen from military service, and giving the Church a unique consultative role in government, especially in the sphere of education. Many of these controversial articles, however, required Parliament to adopt implementing legislation, which it had not done at the end of the reporting period. For example, despite the concordat granting the GOC the right to establish a military chaplaincy, no legislation had been adopted and there were no chaplains in military units.

The Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, and Armenian Apostolic churches, as well as representatives of the Jewish and Muslim faiths, signed formal documents with the GOC patriarchate agreeing to the concordat but stated after the document was published that several of these controversial articles were not in the original that they had signed. Representatives of nontraditional minority religious groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals, were not included in the concordat process. The AAC raised concerns about the authority the GOC enjoys over decisions regarding the return of historically AAC church property.

While most citizens practiced their religion without restriction, the worship of some, particularly adherents of nontraditional faiths, was restricted by threats and intimidation from some local Orthodox priests and congregations. On some occasions during the reporting period, local police were slow to prevent the harassment of non-Orthodox religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals.

On February 14, 2006, members of Jehovah's Witnesses requested permission to use the privately owned sports palace in Tbilisi for a two-day religious convention for up to five thousand persons. On February 22, 2006, the management of the sports palace responded that they would be willing to accommodate such a convention only if Jehovah's Witnesses obtained a guarantee from the state to provide security. An identical request they made in April 2005 had received a similar response from the management. The 2005 incident prompted an investigation by the PGO; results were pending at the end of the reporting period.

A 2001 Supreme Court ruling revoked the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses as a foreign branch of the U.S.-based Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that the law does not allow registration of religious organizations. The revocation resulted from a 1999 court case brought by a former MP seeking to ban the group on the grounds that it presented a threat to the state and the GOC. A case brought by Jehovah's Witnesses before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2001 challenging this annulment was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. It was unclear how the acknowledgement by the Government of the lawfulness of the Jehovah's Witnesses' registration and four subsequent registrations by other religious organizations as branches of foreign noncommercial legal entities would affect the case before the ECHR.

The Catholic and Armenian Apostolic churches have been unable to secure the return of churches and other facilities closed during the Soviet period, many of which later were given to the GOC by the state. The prominent AAC church in Tbilisi, Norashen, remained closed, as did four smaller AAC churches in Tbilisi and one in Akhaltsikhe. In addition, the RCC and AAC, like Protestant denominations, have had difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches.

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 de facto leader of Abkhazia banning Jehovah's Witnesses in the region remained in effect but was

not enforced. During the reporting period Jehovah's Witnesses reported no problems in Abkhazia, where membership was approximately 1,500. Although Baptists, Lutherans, and Catholics also reported that they were allowed to operate in the region, the GOC reported it was unable to do so. The patriarch expressed concern over Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) support of separatism in the region, specifically subsidizing websites 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.

Orthodox believers 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 control of Ossetian authorities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While there were fewer physical attacks on religious minority groups during the reporting period, harassment continued. Although police rarely facilitated harassment of religious minority groups, they sometimes failed to protect them.

There was sporadic harassment of members of nontraditional religious groups. Occasionally local Orthodox priests and their congregation members verbally and physically threatened members of minority groups and prevented them from constructing places of worship and from holding worship services. Representatives of the affected groups regularly filed complaints with the PGO and the ombudsman.

Within the PGO, the Human Rights Protection Unit monitors the progress of investigations and prosecution of cases involving abuses of religious freedom. During the reporting period, twenty instances of interference, threats, intimidation, or violence were investigated. In five instances, cases were awaiting trial; in eleven instances, the investigations were ongoing; and in four instances, the investigation did not find sufficient evidence to support charges. In October 2005 a case against J. Megenishvili, for interfering in the performance of a religious service, was forwarded to the Tbilisi city court for trial. In August 2005 the prosecutor general initiated an investigation related to an attack on two members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Lamara Tskhovrebadze and Guliko Palivashvili. That investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

In Rustavi on August 28, September 1, and October 18, 2005, Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that thirty persons blocked the road leading to a home used for services. At the request of the public defender, an investigation was launched. The investigation found that the congregation had not been subjected to threats or violence.

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 in Respect for Religious Freedom

Pursuant to a new registration law adopted in April 2005, religious groups can obtain legal status, which provides benefits such as the ability to enter into contracts, open bank accounts, and own property. While many religious groups praised the legislation, more traditional religious groups continued to push for special legal status that would set them apart from nontraditional religious groups. Some religious groups also complained that the amendment did not provide for registering property that they already owned under personal title. While the parliamentary legal committee agreed to hold consultations to help religious groups overcome this hurdle, the law was not amended before the end of the reporting period.

Nontraditional religious groups reported that they were able to import literature without seizure or delay. The AAC stated, however, that imports of religious items such as candles were sometimes delayed due to ambiguities about the Church's legal status in the country.

While Jehovah's Witnesses no longer believed it was necessary, for security reasons, to hold their services in private homes, due to delays in obtaining permits to build and occupy Kingdom Halls, congregations often continued to meet in private homes.

In an effort to implement a 2001 Supreme Court ruling, the Jewish community reached an agreement with a theater group whereby the theater group vacated a hall in a Tbilisi building seized from the Jewish community during Soviet rule. While the Jewish community was able to use the hall, the situation was not fully resolved, because the community could not use the hall as a synagogue.

In July 2005 the GOC patriarch and the ombudsman established religious councils as forums to discuss ecumenical approaches to addressing social problems such as poverty and drug addiction.

On November 2, 2005, the appeals court upheld a trial court decision sentencing excommunicated Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili to six years' imprisonment for engaging in numerous attacks on nontraditional religious minorities including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. The four-year sentence of his accomplice Petre Ivanidze was also upheld.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The public's attitude towards religion was ambivalent. Although many residents were not particularly observant, the link between the country's Orthodoxy and ethnic and national identity was strong.

The Jewish communities reported that they encountered few societal problems. Anti-Semitism has not been a significant problem in recent years, and there were no reported incidents during the period covered by this report.

Relations between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims were very good; Sunni and Shi'a worshipped together in Tbilisi's mosque. Relations between Muslims and Christians were also quite good. There were occasional media reports of minor incidents of violence between ethnic Azeris and ethnic Georgians or ethnic Armenians; however, these incidents did not appear to be motivated by religious differences.

Despite their historical tolerance toward minority religious groups traditional to the country—including Catholics, Armenian Apostolic Christians, Jews, and Muslims—many citizens remained apprehensive about Protestants and other nontraditional religious groups, which they often viewed as taking advantage of the populace's economic hardship by gaining membership through economic assistance to converts. Many members of the GOC and the public viewed religious minorities, especially nontraditional groups of evangelical Protestants or so-called "sects," as a threat to the national church and the country's cultural values.

Local Orthodox priests and public school teachers vocally criticized minority religious groups and interfaith marriages. Some also discouraged Orthodox followers from any interaction with students who belonged to Protestant churches. Sometimes teachers ridiculed students who had converted to Protestant faiths, claiming the students converted because they were offered financial benefits.

In 1997 the GOC withdrew from the World Council of Churches to appease clerics strongly opposed to ecumenism. Some Orthodox Church officials had ties to the Jvari organization that was involved in physical attacks on nontraditional religious organizations and to two fundamentalist Orthodox groups, the Society of Saint David the Builder and the Union of Orthodox Parents, which denounced activities of non-Orthodox churches or organizations.

GOC authorities accused AAC believers of purposely altering some existing Georgian Orthodox churches so that they would be mistaken for AAC churches. AAC representatives accused GOC believers of similar activities. On July 14, 2005, in the village of Samsara in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region, a group of ethnic Georgian students and GOC nuns were attacked by ethnic Armenian villagers as they were cleaning up a church whose ownership is in dispute. The villagers accused the students and nuns of trying to erase crosses symbolic of the AAC from the building and of placing Orthodox icons in the church. After the ombudsman intervened, representatives from both the GOC and the AAC issued a joint statement denouncing the violence and calling for forgiveness of those who had used force.

Following a series of physical and verbal threats in April and May 2005 against a group of Russian Pentecostals attempting to hold services in a private home in Tbilisi, the ombudsman helped the congregation obtain a plot of land on which to construct a new building for services. While plans for the building were being drawn up, the congregation conducted services in undisclosed private homes or in outdoor areas. Police routinely provided protection in the latter case. No charges were filed in connection with the April and May 2005 incidents.

Following a series of incidents which began in June 2005 in Kutaisi during which local residents repeatedly attacked members of Jehovah's Witnesses in an effort to stop renovations to a meeting house, numerous investigations were launched into the attacks as well as into reports that the police had been slow to respond to the violence and then themselves threatened the Jehovah's Witnesses. Two individuals who were detained in connection with the attack publicly apologized to the Jehovah's Witnesses. In April 2006, at the request of Jehovah's Witnesses, the criminal charges against the two persons were dropped. The meetinghouse in Kutaisi operated freely afterwards.

In August 2005 a large and vocal protest continued for two days at the Nunciature of the Holy See in Tbilisi. A GOC parents group, objecting to perceived proselytizing by the Catholic Church, carried out the protest. The group also included Orthodox clergy. Police did not disperse the protesters even when objects were thrown at the Nunciature.

In September 2005 an ecumenical memorial service was held for the victims of Hurricane Katrina and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Representatives from most Protestant denominations and of the Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish faiths participated.

Between November 24 and 26, 2005, the Christian Research Center, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) affiliated with the GOC, held a symposium to promote dialogue and tolerance. Representatives from the AAC, the RCC, and other denominations participated. During a presentation by the bishop of the Lutheran Evangelical Church, however, hecklers verbally abused him.

In December 2005 in the village of Tsinubani in the predominantly ethnic Armenian region of Samtskhe-Javakheti, a local AAC priest denounced a local Pentecostal congregation and urged villagers to prevent the latter from burying its members in the local cemetery. The ombudsman called for an investigation which is still pending.

Acts of religious violence between 2000 and 2004 went unpunished, sometimes despite the filing of numerous criminal complaints. For example, no criminal cases were expected to be opened for the following incidents: The October 2004 incident in the village of Velistsikhe, where local Orthodox priests and congregation members used verbal and physical threats to block Baptists from constructing a church; the June 2003 arson attack on a Baptist church in Akhalsopheli; the July 2004 incident in Ozurgeti during which an employee of the mayor's office verbally and physically threatened two members of Jehovah's Witnesses who were proselytizing door-to-door; the November 2004 incident during which a member of Jehovah's Witnesses was threatened several times for using his house in Kareli to hold worship services; or the November 2004 assault by members of the conservative Orthodox group, "The Society of Saint David the Builder," on several more liberal GOC seminary students.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government repeatedly raised its concerns regarding harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with senior government officials, including the president, speaker of Parliament, the ministers of internal affairs and justice, and the prosecutor general. Embassy officials, including the ambassador, frequently met with representatives of the Government, Parliament, various religious confessions, and NGOs concerned with religious freedom issues.

An embassy official advocated with the Ministry of Justice on behalf of religious organizations seeking recognition under the registration law adopted in April 2005.

GERMANY

The Basic Law (constitution) provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, discrimination against certain religious minorities remained an issue.

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

Although the country's religious demography grew increasingly complex, the generally amicable relationships among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 and Jehovah's Witnesses; and bans in certain states on the wearing of headscarves by female Muslim teachers in public schools.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government placed particular emphasis on support for direct dialogue between representatives of minority religious groups and relevant government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 137,847 square miles, and its population was approximately 82 million. There were no official statistics on religious groups; however, unofficial estimates and figures provided by religious organizations gave an approximate breakdown of the membership of the country's denominations. The data below were compiled from various sources and are for 2004, unless otherwise noted.

The Roman Catholic Church had a membership of approximately 26.2 million. The Evangelical Church, a confederation of the Lutheran, Uniate, and Reformed Protestant churches, had approximately 25.8 million members. Together, these two churches accounted 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, 380,000; Ethnic German Baptists from the Former Soviet Union (FSU), 300–380,000; and Baptist, 85,000. Muslims number 3.3 million (2003), including Sunnis, 2.2 million (2001); Alawites, 340,000 (2000); and Shiites, 170,000 (2000). Orthodox Christians number 1.4 million, including Greek Orthodox/Constantinople Patriarchate, 450,000; Serbian Orthodox, 150,000; Romanian Orthodox, 80–100,000; and Russian Orthodox/Moscow Patriarchate, 50,000. Buddhists number 240,000, and Jehovah's Witnesses 166,000. Jews number 189,000, including Central Council Affiliated, 105,000; and nonaffiliated, 80,000. Hindus number 97,500.

Under a liberal immigration policy from 1990 to 2005, more than 199,000 Jews and their dependents from the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) came to the country. In mid-2005, the Government and Jewish organizations agreed to new, more restrictive procedures for Jewish immigration from the FSU, in order to better regulate the influx.

An estimated twenty-one million persons, or one-quarter of the population, either had no religious affiliation or belonged to unrecorded religious organizations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law (constitution) provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, discrimination against and unequal treatment of some minority religious groups remained an issue, in part because of the legal/constitutional structure of church-state relations. The structure for managing church-state relations, established in 1949, was 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.

The Muslim communities remained an exception. Few Muslim organizations had applied for public law corporation status and no state had granted the status, in part because of intra-Muslim disputes over whether any Muslim organization was representative of the community and/or met the criteria for the status. In principle, the federal Government is in favor of the states' granting public law corporation status to Muslim communities but would like Muslims to agree upon a single organization with which the state and federal governments could deal. Efforts to bring to-

gether at least several of the Muslim organizations providing religious services were ongoing.

The state provides subsidies to some religious organizations for historical and cultural reasons. In view of German 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 $3.75 million (3 million euros) 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. In late 2005, the Central Council and the German branch of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) resolved differences over the role of the WUPJ and the use of Central Council funds to support WUPJ-affiliated communities and activities.

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. Depending on the state, a nonreligious ethics course or study hall may be available for students not wishing to participate in religious instruction. In early 2005, a dispute arose between the state of Berlin and the Evangelical and Catholic churches over proposals to establish a mandatory secular ethics course for all students in Berlin public schools. The state argued that, because of the low level of participation in religion classes and the relatively high proportion of Muslim students, such a course was needed. The churches argued that the state should not be responsible for transmitting ethical values and cannot properly teach about the ethical content of religions. Although confessional education would remain available in Berlin on a voluntary basis, the churches believed that their teaching would be undermined. As of April 2006, the state planned to introduce the new course into seventh grade classes in August 2006.

How to provide Islamic education in public schools was a controversial topic nationally. 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 varies from state to state. Organizations providing Islamic instruction do not have public law corporation status.

Bavaria, in cooperation with the Turkish government, has offered Islamic religious instruction in Turkish in its public schools since the 1980s. Since 2001, in a separate state-initiated and much smaller program, Islamic instruction has been offered in German. In 2003–2004, a pilot Islamic education program in German in cooperation with the local Muslim community began at one public school.

Baden-Wuerttemberg was scheduled to offer Islamic religious courses in select public schools in 2006–2007. Local Islamic organizations were expected to be responsible for the religious classes, using a curriculum developed by the state.

Since 2001, the Islamic Federation of Berlin has provided Islamic instruction in several Berlin schools. The decision has drawn criticism from Muslim organizations not represented in the Federation, and from others concerned about the Federation's alleged links to a Turkish group classified as extremist by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC). In June 2005, media reported that the state government was planning to establish a training program for teachers of Islam at the Free University to permit the development of a state-sponsored alternative to the Islamic Federation's program; however, no action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2003, Lower Saxony began a pilot Islamic instruction program in German in eight elementary schools. The program was developed by the state in collaboration with local Muslim communities and was expanded to seventeen elementary schools in 2005. In January 2006, the minister-president announced his intention to further expand the program to meet a surge in demand from parents.

In North Rhine-Westphalia, Islamic instruction began in Turkish in 1999. As of 2004, Islam was taught, through a state-developed curriculum in German, to more than 6,000 students. By 2006, 130 schools offered this curriculum. However, these

courses seek to provide objective information about Islam rather than educate students in their faith, as is the case in Protestant and Catholic classes. Efforts are underway to develop such a course in cooperation with Islamic organizations.

One school in Bremen offers instruction in Islam. The government of Schleswig-Holstein has begun to consider how to introduce Islamic instruction in German. In March 2006, the Saarland Parliament resolved to consider the possibility of Islamic instruction, should Muslim organizations request it. The state education minister declared that he favored Muslim participation in nondenominational ethics courses. No Islamic instruction was provided in Hamburg during the period covered by this report, but, in February 2006, the minister-president proposed that independent Islamic studies be offered in schools. The proposal was before the Hamburg Parliament at the end of the period covered by this report. The state of Hesse has not introduced Islamic instruction because of disputes over the curriculum and Islamic community representation. In a number of eastern states (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt), the number of Muslim students was too small and dispersed for Islamic instruction to be practicable.

Ministry of Defense efforts to develop a Muslim chaplaincy have failed because of an inability to reach agreement on a plan with the multiple Muslim groups. Independently, the ministry has developed a code of conduct to facilitate the practice of Islam by an estimated 3,000 Muslim soldiers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In May 2006, the Government sent a draft anti-discrimination law to Parliament for consideration. The law is based on—but also goes beyond—European Union requirements and would ban discrimination on grounds of religion. Representatives of various minority religious groups believed the new law, once enacted and enforced, would improve their legal and civil standing.

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."

The Federal Interior Ministry's 1995 immigration exclusion (refusal to issue a visitor's visa) continued in force against the founder of the Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, and his wife, Hak Ja Han Moon. The 1995 decision also placed Rev. and Mrs. Moon on the "Schengen" list, which bars their entry into many other European states, and was based on the Government's characterization of Rev. Moon and his wife as leaders of a "cult" that endangers the personal and social development of young persons. The Unification Church was seeking to overturn the ban in the courts.

A ten-year legal effort by Jehovah's Witnesses to overturn a 1995 Berlin state government (Senate) decision to deny them public law corporation status was resolved in May 2006. The Senate had refused to grant the status because the Jehovah's Witnesses' bar on members voting raises questions about its loyalty to the democratic state, and because its use of corporal punishment and separation of members leaving the religion from their families raise human rights concerns. In mid-2005, the Senate accepted a March 2005 Berlin Administrative Court ruling in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Following successful negotiations between the Senate and the Witnesses on implementation of the ruling, the Senate formally granted public law corporation status to the church in May 2006.

The Church of Scientology, which operated eighteen churches and missions, remained under observation (as it has been since 1997) by the federal and seven state Offices for the Protection of the Constitution (OPCs), out of concern that the Church's teachings and practices are opposed to the democratic constitutional order or violate human rights. In deciding whether to observe an organization, OPC officials collect publicly available information, mostly from written materials and from public events, to assess whether a "threat" exists. In addition, OPC staff and law enforcement officials also directly approached Scientologists for information, a practice many find a form of intimidation and harassment. More intrusive observation methods are subject to legal checks and would require evidence of involvement in treasonous or terrorist activity.

The Church of Scientology appeal of a November 2004 Cologne court ruling, which stated that OPC observation was justified and could continue, remained before the Higher Administrative Court in Muenster; a decision was not expected until 2007. In recent years, however, many state OPCs have opted to stop their observations of Scientology; exceptions included Baden-Wuerttemberg, Bavaria, and Hamburg,

which remained particularly stringent. Despite this reduced observation, the federal OPC's 2006 annual report concluded that the original reasons for initiating observation of Scientology in 1997 remained valid, although it noted that Scientology had not been involved in any criminal activity. Scientologists contended that OPC observation was harmful to the Church's reputation and continued to seek redress through the courts.

Several states published pamphlets about Scientology (and other religious groups) that detailed the Church's ideology and practices. States defended the practice by noting their responsibility to respond to citizens' requests for information about Scientology as well as other subjects. While many of the pamphlets were factual and relatively unbiased, some warned of alleged dangers posed by Scientology to the political order, to the free market economic system, and to the mental and financial well being of individuals.

Beyond the Government's actions, the Catholic Church and, especially, the Evangelical Church have been public opponents of Scientology. Evangelical "Commissioners for Religious and Ideological Issues" have been particularly active in this regard.

In response to concerns about Scientology's ideology and practices, government agencies at the federal and state level and private sector entities had established rules and procedures that discriminate against Scientology as an organization and/or against individual members of the Church. For example, in 2001, the federal Government had prohibited firms bidding on government training contracts from using the "technology of L. Ron Hubbard" (a proprietary term used by the Church of Scientology) in executing contracts. Firms owned, managed by, or employing Scientologists could, however, bid on contracts. Some states and private business groups adopted variations, in some cases more stringent, of this rule. In addition, since 1996, government employment offices throughout the country had implemented an Economics and Labor Ministry administrative order directing them to enter an "S" notation next to the names of firms suspected of employing Scientologists. Employment counselors were supposed to warn their clients that they might encounter Scientologists in these workplaces. Some private job centers also adopted this practice. In late 2005, the federal Agency for Labor formally informed the Church of Scientology that this practice was no longer followed.

In 2005, Scientologists continued to report instances of societal and official discrimination. A subcontractor to a Munich branch of a telecommunications company asserted that she had been fired in June 2005 for being a Scientologist after her employer was asked whether she employed Scientologists. Since March 1, 2005, applicants for German citizenship in Bavaria have been required to fill out a questionnaire regarding their affiliation with organizations under observation by the state OPC, including Scientology. The Church documented two cases involving persons whose naturalization requests were denied, allegedly because of membership in the Church. However, in November 2005, the Bavarian Administrative Appeals Court affirmed the right of a Scientology "Celebrity Center" to call itself a "registered association," as a nonprofit social group whose members share a common purpose. In December 2005, the Federal Supreme Administrative Court ruled, on the basis of freedom of religion, that the city-state of Hamburg could no longer distribute forms which companies used to obtain a statement from their business partners that the partner would not use "the technology of L. Ron Hubbard" in its business. Scientology representatives, however, stated that the city-state has not implemented the ruling in good faith, leaving critical material on its website.

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.

A large number of Muslim organizations, including some which profess to be engaged in specifically and solely peaceful religious, social and/or cultural activities, were under observation by state and federal OPCs. These included, for example, the Cologne-based Association of Islamic Cultural Centers and the Islamic Federation of Berlin. The Islamic Religious Community of Hesse (IRH), that state's largest Muslim umbrella organization, protested its listing in the 2005 Hesse OPC Report. In reply, the Hesse Interior Ministry claimed that IRH activities, such as limiting female participation and promoting Shari'a, contradict basic principles of the constitution. IRH leaders expressed concern that the listing undermines the state's dialogue with the Muslim community and the group's leader announced that he would resign and leave the country in protest. In June 2006, the State Administrative Court ruled that, while OPC observation could continue, the IRH could not appear in the 2007 report unless the OPC presented new information.

After 2003, the Federal Constitutional Court cleared the way for state legislation that would ban female Muslim teachers from wearing headscarves at work; several states indicated their intention to enact laws prohibiting Muslim public servants from wearing headscarves on duty. From April 2004 to June 2006, eight states had passed such 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 the case in Baden-Wuerttemberg, this legislation was under judicial review at the end of the reporting period. In October 2005, the state government proposed extending the ban to include kindergarten teachers, a proposal that generated much opposition but remained on the table as of May 2006.

In April 2006, a Bonn high school principal, backed by the regional school authority, suspended two eighteen-year old Muslim students who sought to wear burqas to class. The principal defended his decision on pedagogical grounds, and one student agreed not to wear the burqa; the other dropped out of the public school system.

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

According to the 2006 report by the OPC, the total number of registered anti-Semitic crimes rose significantly from 1,316 in 2004 to 1,658 in 2005. Among these, the number of violent crimes increased from thirty-seven to forty-nine. Desecration of Jewish cemeteries or other monuments was the most widespread anti-Semitic act. On April 18–19, 2006, the oldest Jewish cemetery in Europe, located in Mainz, was desecrated. The police announced that the act was probably the work of right-wing extremists (although no epithets or political symbols were used), but the actual perpetrators remained unknown.

In January 2005, following criticisms from a member of Parliament, the Hesse criminal office began investigating virulently anti†Semitic reporting by the Istanbul-based newspaper Vakit. The interior minister banned the newspaper and its publisher. In August, prosecutors concluded they could not charge the editors since the articles were written abroad.

On March 3, 2005, the radio station SWR Four withdrew its invitation to singer Christian Anders to perform at an event after Anders' Holocaust denial on his private Web site was publicized. Anders had also re-edited and published an anti-Semitic song.

On August 15, 2005, the Electoral Alternative for Social Justice Party in Trier expelled its county chairman, Wolfgang Schmitt, for using anti-Semitic rhetoric.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

The country was simultaneously becoming increasingly secular and religiously diverse. Regular attendance at religious services decreased. Fifteen years after reunification, the eastern part of the country remained far more secular than the west. Only 5 to 10 percent of eastern citizens belonged to a religious organization.

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 found 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.

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 Jewish nongovernmental organizations. The state also provided twenty-four-hour police protection at synagogues and many other Jewish institutions.

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 or disagreements over whether Muslims may use loudspeakers in residential neighborhoods to call its adherents to prayer. Authorities ar-

gued 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 (e.g., noise and traffic levels) and security concerns were also factors. Local opposition in Munich, for example, delayed plans to build a new mosque there and, in early 2006, efforts to build a new mosque in eastern Berlin prompted widespread community and political opposition, in part because of questions about the sponsoring groups' funding sources and socio-political orientation. Islamic instruction in Turkish or Arabic also came under criticism from politicians and others who were concerned that such classes may convey anti-constitutional or anti-Western messages.

On several occasions, police raided mosques and other Muslim institutions in connection with counter-terrorism investigations. Some raids, such as the September 2005 large-scale raids in Hesse, triggered accusations of discrimination from members of the mosque. Muslim representatives criticized the Hesse raids as an excessive and arbitrary "dragnet." There also remained areas where the law and Islamic practices conflicted with one another, for example, with regard to the call to prayer, Muslim ritual slaughtering, or the segregation of older boys and girls during sports classes. Muslim organizations also criticized various proposals from several states for naturalization tests in early 2006 as reflecting a generalized suspicion of Muslims and rejection of them as potential citizens.

The Evangelical Church employed "Commissioners for Religious and Ideological Issues" (often referred to as "sect commissioners") to investigate "sects, cults, and psycho-groups" and to publicize what they considered 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 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 web-page on "sects." The Catholic Church also employed similar commissioners, who generally restricted their activities to providing counsel to individuals with questions about "sects."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses all aspects of religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, including the status of Islamic education and attitudes toward the Muslim community. 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.

GREECE

The constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice. However, while the Government generally respected this right, 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.

There were some improvements in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report; the Government passed a law allowing cremation and amended a law abolishing the requirement to consult local Greek Orthodox bishops before granting house of prayer permits.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 approximately 10.9 million. An estimated 97 percent of Greek citizens identified themselves as Greek Orthodox. There were approximately 500,000 to 800,000 Old Calendarist Orthodox who used the Julian calendar and adhered to traditional Greek Orthodox practice throughout the country. The Government did not keep statistics on religious groups; the census did not ask for religious affiliation. Officials estimated the size of the Thrace Muslim community at 98,000, although unofficial estimates ranged up to 140,000. The Jehovah's Witnesses reported having approximately 30,000 active members and 50,000 people affiliated with the faith; members of the Roman Catholic faith were estimated at 50,000; Protestants, including evangelicals, at 30,000; and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) at 420. Scientologists reported 500 active registered members. The longstanding Jewish community, which prior to the World War II occupation of Greece and deportation of thousands of Jews to Nazi death camps had numbered some 76,000, was estimated at approximately 5,500. There were approximately 300 members of the Baha'i Faith. Followers of the ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions reported 2,000 members. There was no official or unofficial estimate of atheists.

The majority of non-citizen residents and immigrants were not Greek Orthodox. The largest group was Albanian (approximately 700,000, including legal and illegal residents); most Albanians were secular in orientation. Despite such secularism, Albanians traditionally associated themselves with the Muslim, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic faiths. Aside from the indigenous Muslim minority in Thrace, the Muslim immigrant population in the rest of the country was estimated at 200,000 to 300,000.

Roman Catholics resided primarily in Athens and on the islands of Syros, Tinos, Naxos, and Corfu, as well as in the cities of Thessaloniki and Patras. Immigrants from the Philippines, Poland, and Iraq also practiced Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic immigrant population was estimated to be 200,000. The bishop of Athens headed the Roman Catholic Holy Synod.

Some religious groups, such as evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses, consisted almost entirely of ethnic Greeks and some immigrants from former Soviet republics and Albania. Other groups, such as Mormons and Anglicans, consisted of an approximately equal number of ethnic Greeks and non-Greeks.

The indigenous Muslim minority, concentrated in Thrace with small communities in Rhodes, Kos, and Athens, was composed mainly of Turcophones but also included Roma and Pomaks, a Slav-origin linguistic minority. A growing number of Muslim immigrants lived in Athens and in rural areas.

Scientologists and followers of the ancient polytheistic Hellenic religions practiced their faith through registered nonprofit civil law organizations.

Foreign missionary groups in the country, including Protestants and Mormons, were active; Mormons reported that there were approximately sixty missionaries in the country during the year.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodoxy) as the prevailing religion and provides for freedom of religion. However, while the Government generally respected this right in practice, non-Orthodox groups sometimes faced administrative obstacles or encounter 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 Orthodox Church exercises significant political and economic influence. The Government financially supports the Greek 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 two official Muslim religious leaders (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 in appeals to the Government to the fact that the Government pays the salaries of religious officials from the Greek Orthodox and Muslim faiths,

but not to 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 considered to be "legal persons of public law." Other religions are considered "legal persons of private law." In practice, the primary distinction is that the Civil Code's provisions pertaining to corporations regulate the establishment of "houses of prayer" for religions other than the Orthodox Church, Judaism, or Islam. For example, other religions cannot own property as religious entities; the property must belong to a specifically created legal entity rather than to the religious body itself. Other religious communities also face additional legal and administrative burdens because they cannot function as legal entities. The Baha'i and other faiths 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 cannot be represented in court as religious entities and cannot bequeath or inherit property as a religious entity. The law extended legal recognition as a private entity to Roman Catholic churches and related entities established prior to 1946. By virtue of the Orthodox Church's status as the prevailing religion, the Government recognizes the Orthodox Church's canon law, both within the Church and in such areas of civil law as marriage. The Catholic Church unsuccessfully has sought government recognition of its canon law since 1999. In April 2006, the Ministry of Education and Religion established a committee to study the issue and propose a legislative arrangement.

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.

Scientologists have not been able to register or build a house of prayer. Groups that follow the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition also applied for house of prayer permits, which the ministry announced in May 2006 were not approved despite advice from the ombudsman to the ministry to respond positively to the requests. The Jehovah's Witnesses have several pending house-of-prayer permit requests, but they have not taken the cases to the ombudsman because they received a verbal commitment from the Ministry of Education and Religion that it would approve their applications.

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. In 2004, the Government passed taxation legislation that gradually abolishes, by 2007, tax on property revenues received by Greek Orthodox churches and institutions. While such laws can be applied to all religions upon judicial examination, this practice presents administrative obstacles for non-Orthodox religions.

Muslim religious leaders stated there were approximately 375 mosques in Thrace. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne gives Muslims in Thrace the right to maintain social and charitable organizations called wakfs and allows muftis to render religious judicial services (under Shari'a) in the area of family law.

The Lausanne Treaty provides the Muslim minority in Thrace the right to Turkish-language education and provides a reciprocal entitlement for the Greek minority in Istanbul (estimated at fewer than 2,500 persons). Western Thrace has secular Turkish-language bilingual schools and two Qur'anic schools funded by the state. In 2005, approximately 6,800 Muslim students were enrolled in Turkish bilingual grammar schools, and 1,290 attended minority high schools. Another 350 students attended the Islamic schools. The majority of Muslim minority students, approximately 4,110, attended public Greek-language secondary schools, which were deemed better preparation for Greek-language universities.

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. Approximately 900 Muslim minority students took advantage of this affirmative action program; a small number chose to attend university in Turkey. In April 2005, the minister of education announced that ten full scholarships for the academic year 2005–2006 would be offered to Muslim minority students for postgraduate studies at universities. Only two students eventually benefited from the program; the other eight who were nominated did not qualify to receive the scholarships. Two students who did not qualify for the scholarships, because they had already exceeded the time permitted by the program for the conclusion of their postgraduate studies, filed complaints with the ombudsman's office. The Government planned to offer the scholarships again for the next school year.

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 did not receive remedial Greek instruction other than in one multicultural elementary education "pilot school."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 2000, the Ministry of Education and Religion rejected the application of the Scientologists for recognition and a house of prayer permit on the grounds that Scientology "is not a religion." The Church of Scientology appealed the decision to the Council of State, and then withdrew the appeal in 2003. The Scientologists were registered as a nonprofit organization because the group's legal counsel advised that the Government would not recognize Scientology as a religion.

Minority religious groups have requested that the Government abolish laws regulating house of prayer permits, which are required to open houses of worship. Local police have the authority to bring to court minority churches that operate or build places of worship without a permit. In practice, this happens rarely.

In May 2004, Nikodim Tsarknias, a former Greek Orthodox priest who is now a priest of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, was sentenced to three months in prison, 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 appealed in the country; he intended to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

Several religious denominations reported difficulties in dealing with the authorities on a variety of administrative matters. Privileges and legal prerogatives granted to the Greek Orthodox Church are not extended routinely to other recognized religions. Non-Orthodox religious organizations must provide separate and lengthy applications to government authorities on such matters as gaining permission to move places of worship to larger facilities. In contrast, Greek Orthodox officials have an institutionalized link between the church hierarchy and the Ministry of Education and Religion to handle administrative matters.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses are recognized as a "known" religion, members continued to face some harassment and administrative problems during the period covered by this report. This usually took the form of arbitrary identity checks (although this problem has abated) and local officials' resistance to construction of places of worship. A decision on an appeal by the Jehovah's Witnesses regarding a property dispute over taxation rates involving their officially recognized headquarters was scheduled to be heard at the Supreme Administrative Court in September 2006.

New legislation providing for religious worker visas was passed in 2005, remedying the difficulty reported in the past by some religious denominations in renewing the visas of non-EU citizen religious officials.

Non-Orthodox citizens have claimed that they face career limits within the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and the civil service because of their religions. In the military, generally only members of the Orthodox faith become officers, leading some members of other faiths to declare themselves Orthodox. Few Muslim military personnel have advanced to the rank of reserve officer. There were reports of pressure exerted on Greek Orthodox military personnel, such as being passed over for promotion if they chose to marry in the religious ceremony of non-Orthodox partners.

Muslim citizens in Thrace were underrepresented in public sector employment and in state-owned industries and corporations. While the under-representation was partly due to lower education level and Greek language ability of the available applicant pool, minority activists blamed 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.

Unlike in Thrace, the growing Muslim community in Athens (estimated by local press and experts to be between 200,000 and 300,000 mainly economic migrants from South Asia, the Middle East, and a small percentage of Muslims from Thrace) did not have an official mosque or any official cleric to officiate at religious functions, including funerals. Press reports in 2006 stated that the number of unofficial prayer rooms in Athens ranged from twenty-five to seventy. 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 afford to travel to Thrace had unrecognized religious rites performed. Re-

mains buried in Greek cemeteries were subject to exhumation after three years, a practice overseen by municipalities because of limited space in Greek cemeteries, especially in Attika. This practice has presented a problem for Muslims, as Islamic law does not permit exhumation of remains.

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 April 2006, the Government decided to fund a mosque in central Athens rather than an outlying suburb, but no decisions on location were made.

Greek Orthodox Church leaders have publicly supported the building of a mosque in Athens, although they have stated their opposition to the cultural center. The Orthodox Church reportedly offered the Muslim community in Athens a piece of land for the creation of a Muslim cemetery.

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 ten-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.

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. There was no established procedure or practice for these nongovernmental elections, and the Government did not recognize the "elected" muftis. A portion of the Muslim minority continued to lobby the Government to allow for the direct election of muftis. In May 2006, the appointed Mufti of Komotini expressed his view that "nowhere in the history of Islam has there been an elected mufti."

The Government recognizes Shari'a (the Muslim religious law) as the law regulating family and civic issues of the Muslim minority in Thrace. The First Instance Courts in Thrace routinely ratify decisions of the muftis who have judicial powers on civic and domestic matters. The National Human Rights Committee, an autonomous human rights body that is the Government's advisory organ on protection of human rights, has stated that the Government should limit the powers of the muftis to religious duties and should stop recognizing Shari'a, because it can restrict the civic rights of citizens it is applied to. There are arranged marriages among underage Roma and Muslims, although Greek civil law forbids marriages of children under age eighteen. A parent or legal guardian, however, may apply for a judicial permit for the marriage of an underage person from a First Instance Court in cases of "extraordinary circumstances," such as pregnancy.

In November 2005, the appointed mufti of Komotini instructed all imams under his jurisdiction not to conduct underage marriages. In November 2005, the mufti refused permission for two minors (a twelve-year-old girl and a fourteen-year-old boy) to marry. In January 2006, he advised the guardians of a thirteen-year-old girl, who insisted on marrying despite his prohibition, to turn to the First Instance Court. The court granted her permission to marry.

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, which prior to the 1960s was exercised by the Muslim community. 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 three years as an interim measure pending resolution of outstanding problems. The interim period has been extended every two years by presidential decree.

In the past, Muslim activists have complained that the Government regularly lodges tax liens against the wakfs, although they were tax-free foundations in theory. Under a national land and property registry law that entered into full effect in 1999, the wakfs, along with all property holders, must register all of their property with the Government. The law permits the Government to seize any property that the owners are not able to document; there are built-in reporting and appeals procedures. The wakfs were established in 1560; however, because of the destruction of files during the two world wars, the wakfs are unable to document ownership of

much of their property. Because they have not registered the property, they cannot pay assessed taxes. The Government had not sought to enforce either the assessments or the registration requirement by the end of the period covered by this report.

Members of missionary faiths reported having difficulties with harassment and police detention because of anti-proselytizing laws, but continued to note an improvement during the reporting period because of increased training and instruction given to police officers. Church officials from missionary faiths expressed concern that anti-proselytizing laws remained on the books, although such laws did not seriously hinder their activities.

A law on alternative forms of mandatory national service for religious and ideological conscientious objectors was enacted in 1998 and amended in 2004. In 2001, the Government added a conscientious objector provision in the constitution. The law provides that conscientious objectors may, in lieu of mandatory military service, work in state hospitals, or municipal and public services for two times the length of military service minus one month, typically twenty-three months. Conscientious objector groups and Amnesty International generally characterized the legislation as a positive step, but criticized the longer service term as punitive. They also reported that uneven administration of the civilian service in some cases led to poor working conditions and noted that it would be preferable for the civilian service to be under civilian administration rather than under the Ministry of Defense. Parents of three or more children are exempt from military service.

Mandatory military service is three months for "repatriated" citizens, those who emigrated from the former Eastern bloc and are of Greek origin, and five months for repatriated conscientious objectors. Repatriated conscientious objectors who have in the past completed military service in their country of origin and became conscientious objectors later in their life are ineligible for alternative service and have taken their cases to the courts. For example, on August 26, 2005, a military court in Xanthi sentenced Boris Sotiriadis, a Georgian national of Greek origin, to three and a half years in prison for refusing military service because of his religious beliefs. Sotiriadis had served previously in the Soviet army before becoming a Jehovah's Witness and immigrating to Greece.

Problems also existed for those who became conscientious objectors after they performed their military service and were placed on reservist lists. These conscientious objectors are not recognized, as there is no legal provision covering those who change their status after having completed military service. Several cases involving such conscientious objectors were pending before the Council of State.

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. Members of the Muslim community in Athens were lobbying for Islamic religious instruction for their children.

Some schoolbooks continued to carry negative references to Roman Catholicism, Judaism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the ancient polytheistic Hellenic tradition.

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. Esphigmenou is an Old Calendarist monastery that does not recognize the authority of the Patriarchate. In March 2005, the Council of State declined to rule on the appeal of a 2002 eviction request by the Ecumenical Patriarchate against the abbot of Esphigmenou on the grounds that it was not competent, under the constitution, to judge the ecclesiastic and administrative jurisdiction of the Patriarchate over Mt. Athos, but the Government had not enforced the expulsion order. Approximately ninety similar appeals by other Esphigmenou monks were pending. In late 2005, the Holy Community governing Mt. Athos appointed a new Esphigmenou monastic order, recognized by the Patriarchate, to replace the existing order. An open dispute between the two monastic orders ensued in December. The Esphigmenou monastery complained about restrictions on access to supplies and medical care that it claimed threatened the survival of the monastery. Government and ecclesiastic representatives claimed they preferred to settle this dispute without eviction.

The leader of the Greek Rumi faith, which teaches the theology of the thirteenth-century Persian poet Rumi, founder of the Mevlevi order or "Whirling Dervishes," was sentenced on July 1, 2005, to twenty-five months' imprisonment for defamatory actions related to his "controlling the consciousness" of his followers. The Orthodox Church considers the Greek Rumi community a "sect" whose heresies "threaten to corrupt Greece's religious and national identity." Local and international NGOs con-

demned the conviction, and the Greek Rumi leader was acquitted on appeal in March 2006.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees, apart from the problems of temporary police detention experienced by Mormons.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Most non-Orthodox religious leaders reported that their members (non-missionaries) did not encounter discriminatory treatment. However, police regularly detained Mormon missionaries (primarily from outside the EU who were undergoing the protracted residence permit process), on average once every three months, usually after receiving complaints that the individuals engaged in proselytizing. In most cases, these individuals were held for several hours at a police station and then released with no charges filed. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses reported that their interaction with the police improved during the reporting period because of increased training and instruction given to police officers. Two Jehovah's Witnesses were tried and acquitted in 2004 on proselytism charges.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 anti-Semitic articles or cartoons in the media, contrary to previous years. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Wiesenthal Center, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Greek Helsinki Monitor had denounced the Greek press for anti-Semitic articles and cartoons on several occasions in 2004.

There were no reports of vandalism of Jewish monuments or cemeteries during the reporting period, which had been a problem in previous years. Police remained unable to find perpetrators in the 2004 cases of desecrations of Jewish memorials and plaques in Drama and Komotini.

Anti-Semitic graffiti were repeatedly spray-painted at several spots along the busy Athens-Corinth and Athens-Tripoli highway during 2005 and 2006. Anti-Semitic slogans also reportedly appeared close to the Athens Court complex in November 2005 and on the island of Keffalonia in September 2005. The Wiesenthal Center and a local NGO protested anti-Semitic graffiti on the country's highways and on other public buildings. The extreme right-wing group "Golden Dawn" regularly spray-painted anti-Semitic graffiti on bridges and other structures. In February 2006, the prosecutor filed a lawsuit against "Golden Dawn" for defacing public property and painting anti-Semitic graffiti the last several years on the basis of allegations submitted by a local NGO, the Greek Helsinki Monitor. The Central Board of Jewish Communities of Greece and the Greek Helsinki Monitor submitted testimony. The preliminary investigation was underway.

In April 2006, the Central Board of the Jewish Communities of Greece continued to protest the Easter tradition of the burning of a life-size effigy of Judas, sometimes referred to as the "burning of the Jew," which they maintained propagated hatred and fanaticism against Jews. One Greek Orthodox bishop, a local NGO, 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.

The June 2004 ECRI report recommended that the Greek authorities closely monitor the situation regarding anti-Semitic acts and statements and take all necessary awareness-raising and punitive measures to put a stop to these acts. The report pointed out that Greek public opinion sometimes reflected the prejudices and stereotypes expressed against the Jewish Communities of Greece by the media or public figures. The report continued that, while in some cases judicial authorities took measures to counter expressions of anti-Semitism, in other cases the criminal law provisions against hate speech were not applied.

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 after its destruction during the Holocaust in 1944. Aristotle University, a public institution, was built on top of the expropriated cemetery.

The Government co-sponsored commemorative events in Athens and Thessaloniki in January 2006 for Holocaust Remembrance Day, followed two weeks later by the visit of Israel's President Moshe Katsav, the first official visit of an Israeli head of state to Greece. 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 teacher training seminars on the Holocaust were held in 2005. In 2005, the country became a full member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On March 1, 2006, the Government passed a law allowing cremation. The Greek Orthodox Church forbids cremation of the Greek Orthodox believers (the vast majority of the population), and cremation facilities had not been established in the country by the end of the period covered by this report. Remains of those who wish to be cremated must be shipped at significant cost to countries where cremation is available. Buddhist citizens have claimed that the lack of cremation as an available means of burial infringes on their religious rights.

In June 2006, an amendment to an existing law was accepted by Parliament abolishing the practice by which the ministry sought the opinion of the local Greek Orthodox bishop on whether to grant house of prayer permits for faiths other than Greek Orthodox. Non-Orthodox faiths had objected to this practice.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Religious affiliation was very closely linked to ethnicity. Many attributed the preservation of national identity to the actions of the Greek Orthodox Church during approximately 400 years of Ottoman rule and the subsequent nation-building period. The Church exercised significant social, political, and economic influence, and it 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.

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 Greeks to shun members of these faiths.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officers meet with working-level officials responsible for religious affairs in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education and Religion. The ambassador and other mission representatives discussed religious freedom with senior government officials and religious leaders. The U.S. Mission also regularly discusses religious freedom issues in contacts with other government officials, including mayors, regional leaders, and members of Parliament. Officers from the embassy and the consulate general in Thessaloniki meet regularly with representatives of various religious groups and solicit their participation in embassy social events. Embassy and consulate general officials investigated complaints of religious discrimination brought to their attention.

The ambassador attended Holocaust commemorations in Athens and the consul general represented him at Thessaloniki events. He and other mission officers participated along with the Ministry of Education and the Jewish Museum of Greece in teacher-training conferences on the Holocaust in 2004 and 2005. Mission officers continued to monitor the issue of restitution of Jewish properties in Thessaloniki.

The consular section 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 mission 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 is no state religion; however, the four "historic religions" (Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Jewish) and certain other denominations, such as Unitarian and Orthodox churches, enjoy some privileges not extended to other religious groups.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, several points of friction between the Government and religious organizations developed during the period covered by this report concerning recent laws affecting church-run social institutions.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 35,919 square miles and a population of approximately 10 million.

The 2001 national census, the latest demographic survey available, contained an optional question on religious affiliation, and 90 percent of the population provided a response. According to the census results, 55 percent of citizens were Roman Catholic, 15 percent were members of the Reformed Church, 3 percent were members of the Lutheran Church, and less than 1 percent were Jewish. These four faiths comprised the country's historic religious groups. Three percent of respondents identified themselves as Greek Catholics, and 15 percent of respondents declared no religious affiliation. The remainder was divided among a number of other denominations. The largest of these was the Congregation of Faith, a local evangelical Christian movement. Other denominations included a broad range of Christian groups, including five Orthodox denominations. In addition, there were seven Buddhist groups and three Islamic communities. Citizens were able to donate 1.0 percent of their income to the religious group of their choice. Statistics on tax revenue voluntarily directed by individual taxpayers for use by religious groups confirmed previous official estimates of religious affiliation.

Foreign representatives from a variety of religious groups and missionary organizations, mainly Christian, were active in the country. These representatives were not subject to government regulation or interference.

Strict enforcement of data protection regulations impeded the collection of official statistics on popular participation in religious life; however, surveys and other evidence suggested that the country's citizens were less devout than the average central European. According to a 2004 survey by the Economic Research Institute of Hungary (GFK), 58 percent of respondents declared themselves to be "believers," and 55 percent responded that they believe in "God or the supernatural." Only 15 percent of those 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.

The 1990 Law on the Freedom of Conscience regulates the activities of and the benefits enjoyed by religious communities and establishes the criteria for legal designation. To register, religious groups must submit a statement to a county court declaring that they have at least one hundred followers. The court determines whether the registration of the new group complies with constitutional and legal requirements; these requirements were very loose and registration was essentially pro forma. While any group is free to practice its faith, formal registration makes available certain protections and privileges and grants access to several forms of state funding. In 2005, eight new religious groups were registered by the courts. As of May 2006, there were a total of 146 registered religious groups.

Religious instruction is not part of the curriculum in public schools; however, the Government permits primary and secondary school students to enroll in extracurricular religious education classes. Optional religious instruction is usually held after the normal school day and is taught in school facilities by representatives of religious groups. While the Government makes provisions for minority religions to engage in religious education in public schools, the four historic religions provide the majority of after-hours religious instruction. During the 2005–2006 school year, 46 registered religious groups provided religious instruction to 492,065 students in public schools.

In addition to taxpayer contributions, the Government allocates public funds to registered religions. The Government supplements taxpayer contributions to registered religions in proportion to individual contributions. In 2005, this supplementary funding amounted to $58 million (HUF 12.4 billion). Further funding is provided for a range of activities such as the maintenance of public art collections, the reconstruction and renovation of religious institutions, support for religious instruction, compensation for non-restituted religious property and assistance to church personnel serving the smallest villages. In 2005, this amounted to nearly $120 million (HUF 25.8 billion). The Government also provided financial support for church-run social services and schools on the same level as it does for state-run institutions. This form of support amounted to an estimated $290 million (HUF 62.4 billion) for 2005.

Easter Monday, Whit Monday, All Saints' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as national holidays. These holidays did not negatively affect any religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. While there are several laws that grant rights and privileges to the historic religions, such as per-capita funding for church-run universities, the Government showed steady improvement over the last several years in extending these rights and privileges to every religious group.

In June 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that a statement adopted by the Theology Faculty Council of a Reformed Church University did not violate the provisions of the law on equal treatment, despite the University's proscription on training homosexuals for the priesthood or for religious teaching positions. The judgment noted that since this form of instruction is inseparable from the Church's moral and religious beliefs, it falls within religious freedom of the Church, and the state can not pass legal judgment on it.

In May 2006, the Data Protection Ombudsman published an open letter in which he expressed his concerns over the manner in which the Scientology Church handles the data it records about its members, particularly with the use of the so-called e-meter. Examples of the shortcomings the ombudsman observed were 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 the country's data protection laws. In response, a church spokesperson stated that the ombudsman had overstepped his jurisdiction and interfered in the religious freedom of the Church.

The issue of state financial allocation to the various churches for educational and social services continued to be a source of contention in church-state relations. (The Vatican Treaty and several 1997 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.) In August 2005, a dispute arose between the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity (ICSSZEM), and some of the historical Christian churches over state support of the churches' homes for the elderly. The ICSSZEM minister noted a growing trend among local governments to pass responsibility for retirement homes to the churches, which, according to an interpretation of the Hungarian-Vatican Concordat, are able to secure more funding for these homes from central funds. According to the ICSSZEM minister, these financially motivated actions place a huge burden on the ministry's budget and warrant consideration of modifying the Concordat.

After a September 2005 meeting at the Vatican, the minister of foreign affairs stated that the Government had no intention of modifying the existing Concordat. However, he did recommend adding appendices to clarify the calculation of how much state financing is owed to the churches for various activities.

In early December 2005, leaders of all four historic churches jointly called upon the Government to modify the draft 2006 budget to eliminate what they perceived as discriminatory per capita funding for the public service institutions they operate, particularly schools. On December 16, schools run by two of the historic Christian

churches staged a protest demonstration, calling on the Government to fully equalize the funding. Although the called-for budget modification was not forthcoming, subsequent negotiations with the Government appeared to settle most of the churches' concerns. 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 Concordat. The court had not ruled on the case by the end of the period covered by this report.

The military chaplain service has permanent pastoral representation by the four historic religions in the defense forces. The Government also requires the military to respect the rights of other religions by providing pastoral care for their members. The Ministry of Defense funds and maintains the chaplain service. There is no evidence that soldiers receive preferential treatment for either foregoing or using the service. The Ministry of Justice regulates a similar system for the provision of religious services to prisoners.

Leaders of the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches also complained that state financing of the maintenance of public art collections and other public services for which the churches were responsible was being delayed. In August, the Government acknowledged the delays, attributed them to technical difficulties, and promised that all apportioned funding would be transferred by fall 2006.

Religious groups and the Government agreed on a number of properties to be returned and an amount of monetary compensation to be paid for properties that could not be returned. These agreements were subsumed under the 1991 Compensation Law, which requires the Government to compensate religious groups for properties confiscated by the Government after January 1, 1946. Overall 7,572 claims were made by religious groups for property restitution under the 1991 Compensation Law: 2,695 cases were rejected as inapplicable under the law; the Government decided to return property in 1,897 cases and gave cash payments in another 1,953 cases; and 1,027 cases were resolved directly between former and present owners without government intervention. Real estate cases have involved twelve religious groups: Roman Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Unitarian, Baptist, Romanian Orthodox, Hungarian Orthodox, Budai Serb Orthodox, Hungarian Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, the Salvation Army, and the Confederation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz). While these agreements primarily address property issues and restitution, they also have provisions requiring the Government to support religious organizations that provide social services as well as support for the preservation of religious monuments.

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 churches made use of this new procedure, resulting in the settlement of a further 435 church properties by March 2006. The Catholic Church resolved 430 claims with a value of $112 million (HUF 24.1 billion), leaving only three property cases outstanding. Mazsihisz resolved its final three outstanding claims and the Budai Serb Orthodox Church also closed the restitution process by resolving its two outstanding claims. Members of the Jewish community viewed the restitution process as generally fair but wanted to see compensation paid for the estimated $2 to $16 billion (HUF 430 to 3,440 billion) worth of heirless Jewish properties specifically excluded from the restitution process. Neither the Reformed nor the Lutheran churches opted for the fast-track procedure. Between them and the Catholic Church a total of 310 property claims remain to be settled by 2011.

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 stated that there were fewer acts of vandalism in Jewish cemeteries than in previous years. Concerning those incidents of vandalism that did occur, Jewish community leaders attributed most of them to youths, and did not consider the incidents anti-Semitic.

Representatives of the Jewish community 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. Anti-Semitism figured in the spring 2006 election campaign of the small but vocal far-right wing party MIEP-Jobbik.

The Jewish community also expressed concerns that the Hungarian Soccer Federation was not doing enough to curb anti-Semitic outbursts among the core fans of a few of the country's soccer clubs.

There were no developments in the police investigation of the June 2005 vandalization of the largest Jewish cemetery in Budapest, and observers doubt that it will produce any concrete results.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued its strong efforts to combat anti-Semitism by clearly speaking out against the use of coded speech by right-wing extremists, and the prime minister publicly stated that Hungarians also bear responsibility for the Holocaust.

On April 16, 2006, the speaker of Parliament attended the annual Hungarian Holocaust Remembrance Day gathering at Budapest's Holocaust Memorial Center.

In March 2006, Hungary took over chairmanship of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. The minister of education represented the Government in the position of chairman.

Responding in part to pressure from the Jewish community, in March 2006, the minister of health ordered that the name of Bela Johan be removed from the title of the National Epidemiology Center and that the bust of Johan be taken down. Johan was a state secretary in the Ministry of Interior in the early 1940s, and although certain public health achievements are tied to his name, he was also actively complicit in the drafting and execution of a number of anti-Jewish measures. The Jewish community welcomed the move.

On February 13, 2006, Parliament passed Act LXVII of 2006, which reopened the window for compensation claims from those individuals whose immediate relatives were killed in the Holocaust. Eligible individuals may apply for a lump sum or pension worth up to $1,860 (HUF 400,000) for each parent, sibling, or child who was killed. The act took effect on March 31 and was scheduled to expire on July 31, 2006.

After nearly two years of operation, Budapest's Holocaust Memorial Center, a state-financed institution, opened its permanent exhibition in February 2006.

On January 27, 2006, the prime minister, president, and a host of public figures commemorated the UN-adopted Holocaust Remembrance Day, also the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. In his speech, the prime minister drew attention to the fact that Hungarians were both victims of and accomplices in the Holocaust.

During an October 2005 visit to the United States, Prime Minister Gyurcsany visited the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and attended Hungarian-Jewish community events in the United States.

In an effort to strengthen ties with all religious groups, the minister of culture made regular visits to a host of smaller religious communities not included among the four historic churches. Since his inauguration in February 2005, the minister visited, among others, Buddhist, Krishna, Baptist, Methodist, and other nontraditional religious groups.

During the period covered by this report, the Office of the Prime Minister worked directly with representatives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum to ensure access to Holocaust-era archives.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationships among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, and there was little friction between religions. During the reporting period, 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 a great willingness to work together across a wide range of other areas in order to achieve common social or political goals.

Overall, society welcomed the increasing religious activity that followed the transition from communism. However, lingering effects of the Communist Party's suppression of religion remain. Officials from Christian churches continued to contend that it will be another generation at least before a majority of citizens realize that religion has a vital role to play in the nation's public life.

Church leaders report that the divisive political climate in the country affects societal attitudes toward religion, as church statements on important public issues tend to be seen as politically motivated. Politicians on the left have routinely criticized the churches for their perceived political support for the right ever since the regime change of 1989. This political tension was manifest in the present reporting

period during the spring parliamentary elections, in which a few Christian parishes openly campaigned for the political right, although there were no directions from church leaders to do so. Furthermore, in the first months of 2006, historians reportedly found documents linking present and former leaders of the Catholic Church to the communist-era secret service. The Church, while not fully denying the charges, suggested that the timing of the revelations, which occurred before the elections, was politically motivated.

Reports of vandalism or destruction of Christian and Jewish property exhibited a downward trend, as did burglaries involving places of worship. In 2005, the National Police reported 216 cases of vandalism to cemeteries, as compared to 339 in 2004, and 125 cases of burglary involving places of worship as compared to 148 in 2004. There was no information on which churches owned the cemeteries. Most police and religious authorities considered these incidents to be acts of youth vandalism and not indications of religious intolerance.

In September 2005, an unknown person or persons placed a number of anti-Islamic posters around Budapest. Police did not initiate an investigation, citing freedom of speech. The incident received little attention in the media at the time. There was no measurable public reaction as the incident was minor and isolated and the Muslim community in the country is quite small.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom activities, maintaining regular contact with government officials, members of Parliament, leaders of large and small religious groups, and representatives of local and international nongovernmental organizations that address issues of religious freedom. Through these contacts, embassy officers tracked closely the dispute over parochial school funding and the possible effect on clergy that the country's proposed lustration legislation may have. Embassy officers also worked with Mazsihisz to identify Jewish cemeteries for possible restoration by the U.S. Commission to Preserve America's Cultural Heritage Abroad (USCPACHA). In September 2005, the embassy facilitated a visit from a USCPACHA official to survey three cemeteries for possible restoration.

During the period covered by this report, the embassy facilitated the transfer of Holocaust-era records to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and it lobbied 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, and the Prime Minister's Office to maintain dialogue on restitution issues, and to promote fair compensation.

The embassy continued to urge the Government to speak out against anti-Semitism and hate speech.

ICELAND

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is the state church, enjoys some advantages not available to other faiths in the country and provides social services regardless of creed.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, and there have been no reports of religious persecution.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 39,600 square miles, and a population of approximately 300,000. Most residents lived on or near the coasts. The area surrounding the capital, Reykjavik, was home to approximately 60 percent of the country's total population.

According to the National Statistical Bureau, 251,728 persons (84.1 percent of the total population) were members of the state Lutheran Church. During the reporting period, a total of 1,065 individuals resigned from the Church, as against 214 new

registrants other than infants baptized. Many of those who resigned from the state Church joined one of the structurally and financially independent Lutheran Free Churches, which had a total membership of 13,816 persons (4.6 percent of the population). The breakdown in membership was as follows: Reykjavik Free Church-6,597; Hafnarfjordur Free Church-4,566; and Reykjavik Independent Church-2,653. A total of 14,687 individuals (4.9 percent) were members of 23 other small recognized and registered religious organizations ranging from the Roman Catholic Church (6,451 members) to the First Baptist Church (14 members). There were 11,794 individuals (3.9 percent) who belonged to other or nonspecified religious organizations and 7,379 (2.5 percent) who were not part of any religious organization. There were also religions, such as Judaism, that have been practiced in the country for years but have never requested official recognition. In official statistics, these religions are listed as "other and unspecified." The National Statistical Bureau does not keep track of Jewish community numbers, and there is no synagogue or Jewish cultural center; however, up to sixty people attended 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 identified itself either as atheist or agnostic.

Although the majority of citizens used traditional Lutheran rituals to mark events such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals, most Lutherans did not regularly attend Sunday services.

A 2005 Gallup poll showed that about two-thirds of Icelanders believed in some kind of existence after death.

According to statistics provided by the immigration authorities, the number of foreigners receiving a residence permit 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 comprised more than half of the Roman Catholic population. The Reykjavik Catholic Church held one service each week in English, and many Filipinos attended. A growing number of Catholic Poles lived in the country, where they worked in the fishing and shipbuilding industries. Three Polish priests served the Polish Catholic community. The Catholic Church also employed priests from Argentina, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Slovakia. Since there were few Catholic churches outside of Reykjavik, Lutheran ministers regularly lent their churches to Catholic priests so that they could conduct Masses for members in rural areas.

The Association of Muslims in Iceland (Felag Muslima a Islandi), founded in 1997, had 341 members (out of approximately 800 to 1000 Muslims living in the country, according to the Association). Muslims were mostly concentrated in the capital area, although there were 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 attracted a core group of approximately thirty individuals. A 2000 application for land to build a mosque languished in Reykjavik's planning commission. The city cited competing claims for the land in question, but some observers expressed concern that prejudice was behind the delay.

The Russian Orthodox Church applied for land to build a house of worship in Reykjavik and also experienced frustrating bureaucratic delays. City officials publicly expressed concern that tensions could arise if the Muslims and Orthodox Christians were to erect neighboring facilities, as they have been looking at the same site. While 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.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) accounted for the only significant foreign missionary activity in the country. The U.S.-based First Baptist Church of Iceland in Keflavik, which primarily served U.S. military personnel at Naval Air Station Keflavik (NASKEF), was planning to strengthen its outreach to the broader Icelandic community when NASKEF closed 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 three months for those who publicly deride or belittle the religious doctrines or worship of a lawful religious association active in the country.

Article 62 of the constitution establishes the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the state church and pledges the state's support and protection. Parliament has the power to pass a law to change this article. Although 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's website, "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 in the church." Although few citizens regularly attend services, they see the Lutheran religion as part of their culture and view the closing of a church as losing a part of their heritage. In October 2004, the Alliance Party presented a parliamentary motion on constitutional amendments that included a clause calling for consideration of the separation of church and state. The initiative has not made it out of committee. Sidmennt, the 188-member Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, 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. 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 the public space.

A 1999 law sets specific conditions and procedures that religious organizations must follow to gain state subsidies. All taxpayers sixteen years of age and older must pay a church tax amounting to approximately $121 (ISK 8,472) a year. Individuals are free to direct their church tax payments to any of the religious groups officially registered and recognized by the state. For persons who are not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belong to one that is not registered, the tax payment goes to the University of Iceland, a secular institution. Atheists have objected to having their fee go to the university, asserting that this is inconsistent with the constitutional right of freedom of association.

During the period covered by this report, the Government gave the state church approximately $61.4 million (ISK 4.3 billion). Of that amount, the church tax funded $22.9 million (ISK 1.6 billion), the cemetery tax $10.7 million (ISK 749.5 million), and general revenues $27.1 million (ISK 1.9 billion). The state church operates all cemeteries in the country, and the $10.7 million from the cemetery tax must be used solely for this purpose. All recognized religious denominations have equal access to the country's cemeteries. The church tax also provided a total of $2.4 million (ISK 170 million) to the other recognized religions and a total of $1.5 million (ISK 108 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 of Human Rights, according to the plaintiff. The case was scheduled to go to trial on September 18, 2006.

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, according to Law Number 108/1999, "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 of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs describing the organization's operations over the past year. The law also specifies that the leader of a religious organization must be at least twenty-five 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. Of three groups that applied to register as religious organizations during the reporting period, one, an offshoot of the Icelandic Pagan Association, gained official recognition. The Free Church of Iceland and the Baptist Church of Sudurnes had their applications denied on grounds of not being sufficiently well established.

Law Number 108/1999 confirms that parents control the religious affiliation of their children until the children reach the age of sixteen. However, the Children's Act requires that parents consult their children about any changes in the children's affiliation after the age of twelve, and the National Registry confirms that such changes do take place with the requesting children's signatures. In the absence of specific instructions to the contrary, children at birth are assumed to have the same religious affiliation as their mother and are registered as such.

Under Law Number 66/1995, which regulates public elementary schools, the Government requires instruction in Christianity, ethics, and theology during the period of compulsory education; that is, ages six through sixteen. Virtually all schools are public schools, with a few exceptions such as a Roman Catholic parochial school located in Reykjavik. All schools are subject to Law Number 66 with respect to the compulsory curriculum. However, the precise content of this instruction can vary, and some observers have claimed that religious indoctrination can take place, as the curriculum is not rigid and as teachers often are given wide latitude in the classroom. Some teachers place greater emphasis on ethical and philosophical issues rather than on specifically religious instruction. Lessons on non-Christian religions are part of the curriculum, but teachers ultimately teach mostly about Christianity. The rationale behind the focus on Christianity in religious instruction is based on the creed's historically strong influence on the country's society and culture.

Students may be exempted from Christianity classes. The law provides the minister of education with the formal authority to exempt pupils from instruction in compulsory subjects such as Christianity. In practice, individual school authorities issue exemptions informally. There is no obligation for school authorities to offer other religious or secular instruction in place of Christianity classes.

In December 2005, the Ministry of Education published proposals for a new curriculum for Christianity, ethics, and religious studies in primary schools. The proposals suggested a more multicultural and intellectual approach to religious education and a greater emphasis on teaching a variety of beliefs rather than a single faith. The Ministry of Education was expected to implement the proposals in late 2006. In secondary schools, theology would continue to be taught under the rubric of "community studies" along with sociology, philosophy, and history.

In the 2005–2006 school year, some secondary schools adopted a new Icelandic textbook on world religions. Minority religious organizations, while praising the book's comprehensive coverage, criticized the volume for 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. For example, a picture of the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest place in Islam, located in Jerusalem's Old City, is wrongly captioned as the second holiest place in Islam, located in downtown Jerusalem.

The Government does not actively promote interfaith understanding. The Government does not sponsor programs or official church-government councils to coordinate interfaith dialogue, but many church groups sponsor meetings between the leaders of the various religious organizations. A Japanese-born minister of the state church has been designated to serve the immigrant community and help recent arrivals of all faiths integrate into society. Holocaust education is not a required element of the national school program, but the subject is taught in most schools as part of a mandatory history curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of 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 or acts of violence against, or vandalism of, Jewish community institutions, of which there are none. Incidents of harassment were rare.

When an Israeli border guard delayed and insulted First Lady Dorrit Moussaieff, of Jewish descent and born in Israel, on her departure from that country following a private visit, Moussaieff remarked that the border guard's behavior was the type that led to anti-Semitism. Subsequent broad coverage in the press focused on the First Lady's loss of composure but did not analyze or criticize the statement. A major daily newspaper caricatured the affair in a cartoon showing Moussaieff leading her husband, President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson (portrayed as preparing himself for a fistfight) toward a group of grim-faced Jews—stereotypically rendered with hats, beards, and prominent noses—waiting behind the Western ("Wailing") Wall. The caption read, "Give the damn Jews a good beating, dear Oli." The cartoonist's main aim appears to have been to mock the president—who has not publicly commented on the incident—for subservience to his wife.

Harassment of the country's tiny, inconspicuous Jewish community is infrequent and not organized.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 is still an important part of the country's cultural identity. There were reports of isolated incidents involving inebriated individuals verbally harassing veiled Muslim women on the streets of Reykjavik.

Muslims in the country, seconded by independent observers, have expressed concern that Omega, a Christian television station, broadcasts distorted, negative coverage and commentary on Muslims and Islam. The station's broadcasting area includes Southwest and South Iceland, reaching approximately 75 percent of the country's population. Since June 2002, Omega also broadcast its programming via satellite to continental Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Africa, claiming to reach approximately 45 million homes.

During the last decade, there has been increased awareness of other religious groups, and informal interfaith meetings, seminars, and courses have been held. In May 2005, the National Church for the first time organized an interfaith meeting of the leaders of major registered religious groups (defined as those with 150 or more members). Attendees planned to establish a permanent Interfaith Forum in mid-2006 that would foster dialogue and strengthen links between religious groups. A position paper completed by participants in early 2006 stated that the forum is intended to encourage honest debate on issues of common interest; to fight prejudice and discrimination; to emphasize the social value of religion; and to encourage greater professionalism in the teaching of religion in public schools. The position paper was subject to the nascent organization's formal approval at the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy also maintains a regular dialogue on religious freedom issues with the leaders of various religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In November 2005, the charge d'affaires invited members of the Muslim community, as well as state church officials, NGO immigrant service providers, journalists, and embassy staff with experience in the Muslim world to the ambassador's residence for an Iftar-style meal to celebrate religious diversity and demonstrate Americans' respect for Islam and religious freedom.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 27,136 square miles, and a population of approximately four million. The country is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. According to official government statistics based on the 2002 census, the religious affiliation of the population was 88.4 percent Catholic (3,462,606), 2.9 percent Church of Ireland (115,611), 0.55 percent Christian (unspecified), 0.52 percent Presbyterian (20,582), 0.25 percent Methodist (10,033), 0.49 percent Muslim (19,147), and less than 0.1 percent Jewish (1,790). Approximately 5.5 percent (217,358) of the population stated no preference or adherence to a particular religion.

The number of immigrants increased, and they tended to be non-Catholic. Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continued to grow, especially in Dublin. Immigrants and noncitizens encountered few difficulties in practicing their faiths.

According to 2005 figures released by the Catholic Communications Office (CCO), approximately 60 percent of the 4,155,368 Irish and Northern Irish Catholics attended Mass once a week and 220,000 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, charismatics, and former Catholics) 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 was no discrimination against nontraditional religious groups. There is no legal requirement that religious groups or organizations register with the Government, nor is there any formal mechanism for government recognition of a religion or religious group.

The Employment Equality Act prohibits discrimination in employment on nine grounds, including religion. The Equality Authority works toward continued progress in the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality in employment. The Equal Status 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 was not favored officially or in practice. Because of the country's history and tradition as a predominantly Catholic country and society, the majority of those in political office are Catholic, and some Catholic holy days are also national holidays.

The following holy days are considered national holidays: St. Patrick's Day (the country's national day), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day. These holidays did not negatively affect any religious group.

The Government does not require but does permit religious instruction in public schools. Most primary and secondary schools are denominational, and their boards of management were governed partially by trustees within the Catholic Church or, in some cases, the Church of Ireland. Under the terms of the constitution, the Department of Education must and does provide equal funding to schools of different religious denominations, including Islamic and Jewish schools. Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

In 2003, the Equality Authority published a booklet 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 (i.e., too many Catholics in a Muslim school could prevent the school from having a Muslim "ethos"). However, there were no reports of any children being refused admission to any school for this reason.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy 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 2005, there were reports of acts of vandalism against Jewish establishments in Dublin. The culprit was identified and, in February 2006, sentenced to twenty months in jail for multiple counts of vandalism. He was scheduled to appeal this sentencing on June 26, 2006; however, his appeal was rescheduled to take place in October 2006. The individual was out on bail for these charges at the end of the period covered by this report. In another February 2006 case, the same individual was charged and placed on probation for six months for the 2005 painting of swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti on the Dublin Jewish museum. On May 19, 2006, he was scheduled to face twenty-three further charges of sending offensive e-mails to Jewish community individuals; however, trials pertaining to these charges were rescheduled for September 2006. After his arrest, the attacks on Jewish establishments ceased.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In November 2004, in an effort to reach out across community and faith lines, the Government invited key religious leaders, including the imam from a prominent mosque, to take part in the country's presidential inauguration. In March 2005, government officials took part in a "Muslims in Ireland Today" conference held at a prominent mosque in the country. In addition, the Garda (the police) Racial and Intercultural Office placed 145 Ethnic Liaison Officers around the country to advise police and monitor policing activity in light of the increasing number of ethnic and religious groups that were immigrating to the country. In December 2005, the prime minister announced that the Government initiated contact with and decided to meet annually with leaders of the religious communities to institute regular interfaith dialogues.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Society largely was homogenous; as a result, religious differences were not tied to ethnic or political differences. Various religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academic institutions conducted activities or projects designed to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different 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. In September 2004 the U.S. Embassy began its Muslim Outreach program aimed at fostering greater understanding of political, social, cultural, and religious views prevalent among Muslims in the country, and embassy officials, including the ambassador, met regularly with Muslims. Embassy officials also met with the chief rabbi of the country, the head of the Egyptian Coptic Church, and prominent leaders from both Catholic and Protestant religious groups. The embassy's interfaith Thanksgiving reception facilitated dialogue and understanding of religious freedom among governmental, NGO, religious, and community leaders, and 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 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic Church's influential role in society has led to controversy when church teachings have appeared to influence Catholic legislators on

matters of public policy. Increasing immigration has led to some anti-immigrant sentiment; for the country's many Muslim immigrants, religion has served as an additional factor differentiating them from native-born citizens.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 116,347 square miles, and its population was approximately 58.5 million. An estimated 87 percent of native-born citizens were nominally Catholic, but only 20 percent regularly participated in worship services. According to numbers reported by the communities, members of Jehovah's Witnesses formed the second largest Christian denomination among native-born citizens, numbering approximately 231,000 adherents, followed by members of the Assembly of God (78,000), Methodists and Waldesians (27,000), and Mormons (22,000).

However, immigration—both legal and illegal—continued to add large groups of non-Christian residents, mainly Muslims, from North Africa, South Asia, Albania, and the Middle East. Of 2.9 million legal immigrants, an estimated 1 million were Muslim, primarily Sunnis. There were approximately 75,000 Hindus. Buddhists included approximately 40,000 adherents of European origin and 20,000 of Asian origin. According to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, during the period of German occupation in World War II, Nazi officials deported approximately 8,000 Jews from the country to Auschwitz-Birkenau and other Nazi camps. Almost 2,000 Jews were deported from Rhodes, an Aegean Sea island that had been part of the country before the war. Approximately 7,600 of those deported were killed. Because Italian authorities obstructed the deportations and because many Italian Jews succeeded in hiding or escaped southward to Allied-occupied areas of the country, more than 40,000 Jews survived the Holocaust in the country. The country's Jewish community, during the period covered by this report, numbered approximately 30,000, and maintained synagogues in twenty-one cities. Other significant religious communities included Orthodox churches, small Protestant groups, the Baha'i Faith, and South Asian Hindus. Polls conducted in 2003 showed that approximately 14 percent of the population considered themselves to be either atheists or agnostics.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

Prior to the constitution's adoption in 1947, the country's relations with the Catholic Church were governed by a 1929 Concordat, which resolved longstanding disputes stemming from the dissolution of the Papal States and established Catholicism as the country's state religion. A 1984 revision of the Concordat formalized the principle of a secular state but maintained the practice of state support for religion—support that also could be extended, if requested, to non-Catholic confessions. In such cases, state support is to be governed by legislation implementing the provisions of an accord (intesa) between the Government and the religious confession. An intesa grants ministers of religion automatic access to state hospitals, prisons, and military barracks; allows for civil registry of religious marriages; facilitates special religious practices regarding funerals; and exempts students from school attendance on religious holidays. If a religious community so requests, an intesa may provide for state routing of funds, through a voluntary check-off on taxpayer returns, to that community, a privilege that some communities initially declined but later requested. The absence of an intesa does not affect a religious group's ability to worship freely; however, the privileges granted by an intesa are not always granted automatically, and a religious community without an intesa does not benefit financially from the voluntary check-off on taxpayer returns.

In 1984, the first such accord granted specific benefits to the Waldesian Church. Similar accords, which are negotiated by the Prime Minister's Office and require parliamentary approval, extended similar benefits to the Adventists and Assembly of God (1988), Jews (1989), and Baptists and Lutherans (1995). In 2000, the Government signed accords with the Buddhist Union and Jehovah's Witnesses; however, these intese did not receive parliamentary ratification before that government left office in 2001. The Government initiated negotiations with the Mormons (2000), the Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate (2000), the Apostolic Church (2001), Hindus (2001), and Soka Gakkai, or Japanese Buddhists (2001). The Government chose to complete work on pending requests and submit all such accords—in-

cluding those previously signed with the Buddhist Union and Jehovah's Witnesses—to Parliament as a single package. However, Parliament's term ended in April 2006 without considering either the pending intese or omnibus religious freedom legislation, which incorporated provisions contained in other laws. Divisions among the country's Muslim organizations, as well as multiple Muslim immigrant groups, have hindered that community's efforts to seek an intesa.

The revised Concordat of 1984 accorded the Catholic Church certain privileges. For example, the Church is allowed to select Catholic teachers, paid by the state, to provide instruction in "hour of religion" courses taught in the public schools. This class is optional, and students who do not wish to attend are free to study other subjects or, in certain cases, to leave school early. While in the past this instruction involved Catholic priests teaching catechism, church-selected instructors now may be either lay or religious, and their instruction is intended to include material relevant to non-Catholic religious groups. Problems may arise in small communities where information about other religious groups and numbers of non-Catholic communicants is limited. The constitution prohibits state support for private schools; however, declining enrollment in Catholic schools has led Catholic Church officials, as operators of the country's most extensive network of private schools, to seek government aid.

While Catholicism is no longer the state religion, its role as the dominant religion occasionally gives rise to problems. In 2004, Parliament passed legislation favored by the Vatican that equates an embryo with a human life, prohibits the use of donated sperm for artificial insemination, restricts the production of embryos, and limits scientific research on embryos. The legislation drew support from Catholic legislators across the political spectrum, while secular conservatives and Communists joined to oppose it. In January 2005, Camillo Ruini, president of the Italian Bishops' Conference, urged Catholics to abstain from voting for four referenda to abolish parts of the new fertility law; this sparked strong reactions from some leftist leaders who accused the Catholic Church of inappropriate interference in the political process. The June 2005 referenda failed when only 26 of the required 50-plus percent of the population voted. The low turnout reflected a variety of factors, including Church opposition, the ambivalence of most secular politicians, and voter apathy on a summer weekend. In past years, Catholic politicians joined Pope John Paul II and other church officials (including Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who has since been elected Pope Benedict XVI) in asserting that the draft European Constitution should include language recognizing Europe's Christian heritage.

The continuing presence of Catholic symbols, such as crucifixes, in courtrooms, schools, and other public buildings, has drawn criticism and has led to a number of lawsuits. Judicial decisions reflected public opinion; in a recent poll, 80 percent of Italians supported the presence of crucifixes in public buildings, and another nine percent supported them if they did not offend others. In January, a Muslim who threw a crucifix out of a window in his mother's room in a public hospital was sentenced to eight months in jail under a Fascist-era law that prohibits affronts to the Catholic religion; he was not expected to serve jail time as the courts suspend sentences of less than three years for first-time misdemeanors. In February, 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. In April 2005, a court ruled that crucifixes do not have to be removed from polling stations, as requested by the president of a small Islamic association. In December 2004, the Constitutional Court ruled that, based on a technicality, a 1928 regulation that provides for the display of crucifixes in public classrooms is constitutional. A mother in Venice, who asked that the crucifixes be removed, brought the case. In March 2005, Interior Minister Pisanu argued publicly that the crucifix was a symbol of great value that represented two thousand years of civilization and culture.

Muslim women are free to wear the veil in public offices and schools; however, there were occasional reports of objections to women wearing a burqa (a garment that completely covers the face and body). In August 2004, a woman in Drezzo was fined for wearing a burqa under a seldom-used 1931 law that forbids persons from hiding their identity.

In view of the negative aspects of the country's fascist past, government leaders routinely acknowledge and pay tribute to Jews victimized by the country's 1938 racial laws.

In January 2004, Prime Minister Berlusconi created a new "Inter-Ministerial Commission to Combat Anti-Semitism" to ensure strong, uniform responses to any anti-Semitic acts by the police and local/federal government officials. In December

2004, the Government hosted, with the Anti-Defamation League, an international conference on anti-Semitism.

National, regional, and local authorities organize annual educational initiatives and other events to support National Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27. In 2004, the country acted as Chair of the International Task Force on Holocaust Education and the Ministry of Education organized an international conference to train teachers on the Shoah. In January 2005, Prime Minister Berlusconi attended ceremonies to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and the Speaker of the Italian Senate, Marcello Pera, addressed the special session of the UN General Assembly commemorating the liberation of Nazi death camps with remarks on the importance of acknowledging and combating continued anti-Semitism. In January 2006, the mayor of Rome announced approval of a plan for a museum dedicated to the Shoah; work is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2006. In 2003, Parliament approved the creation of a National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Ferrara; construction had not begun at the end of the period covered by this report.

Missionaries or religious workers do not encounter problems but must apply for appropriate visas prior to arriving in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In March 2006, Abdul Rahman, an Afghan citizen under threat of death because he converted to Christianity, arrived in the country to accept the Government's offer of asylum.

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 violent anti-Semitic attacks in the period covered by this report, but public opinion surveys indicated that anti-Semitism was growing in the country. According to pollsters, this trend was tied to, and in some cases fed by, widespread opposition to the Israeli government and popular support for the Palestinian cause. In 2005, there were some incidents of Israeli diplomats being heckled at public events. Small-scale graffiti (swastikas) were found in major cities. Following a display of anti-Semitic banners and Nazi symbols at a soccer match in January 2006, the offending fans' team was disciplined. The minister of interior called the incident "an unbearable attack against the victims of Nazism and Fascism" and declared that public authorities would enforce laws prohibiting the display of slogans or symbols exalting political violence, racism or xenophobia in sports stadiums. In April 2006, on the anniversary of the country's liberation from Nazism and Fascism, pro-Palestinian demonstrators took an Israeli flag from Jewish Brigade representatives and burned it.

On May 16, 2006, forty Jewish graves (of approximately 6 thousand) in Milan were vandalized. The tombstones were knocked over and broken but there were no signs of anti-Semitic slogans or Nazi symbols. The attack was immediately condemned by leaders of both the center-left and center-right; 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious and government officials continued to encourage mutual respect for religious differences. In March 2006, Rome's Chief Rabbi paid a first-ever visit to Rome's main mosque; a reciprocal visit was being scheduled.

Increasing immigration from Eastern Europe, Africa, China, and the Middle East was altering demographic and cultural patterns in communities across the country and led to some anti-immigrant sentiment. For the country's Muslim immigrants, religion serves as an additional factor differentiating them from native-born citizens. During the 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."

Some members of the Northern League political party, a minority member of the governing coalition, asserted that practices present in many Islamic societies, notably polygamy, Islamic family law, the role of women, and the lack of separation be-

tween religion and state, rendered many Muslim immigrants incompatible for integration into society. In February 2006, Northern League Minister for Reform Roberto Calderoli went on television wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with controversial cartoons mocking Muhammad. Following violent reactions, including an attack on the country's consulate in Bengazhi, Libya, Prime Minister Berlusconi called for and received Calderoli's resignation.

In November 2005, Interior Minister Pisanu established a sixteen-member Islamic Consultative Council comprised of Italian and immigrant Muslims designed to open dialogue on how to improve the lives of moderate Muslims. The Council met three times in 2006 to offer advice to the Government on immigration, housing, education, employment, and related policies. At the same time, the Government continued a crackdown on illegal immigration and deportations of suspected Muslim extremists. During the reporting period, it expelled thirteen Muslims, including Turin-based Imam Bouchta Bouriki, on terrorism-related charges.

In December 2004, the minister of equal opportunity created a new national Office to Combat Racial and Ethnic Discrimination to monitor and prevent discrimination and assist victims with legal assistance. The office established a hotline to receive complaints and began a public relations effort to discourage ethnic, racial and religious discrimination.

Government units provide funds for the construction of places of worship as well as public land for their construction, and they help preserve and maintain historic places of worship that shelter much of the country's artistic and cultural heritage. In 2001, the Campania regional administration approved the request for approximately $3.1 million (2.6 million euros) to build a mosque in Naples despite the absence of a formal intesa between the state and the Muslim confession. Construction had not yet begun at the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, bureaucratic problems persisted for some minority religions.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, lingering suspicions remained toward newer, nontraditional faiths.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 25 thousand square miles, and an estimated population of approximately 2.3 million. The three largest faiths were Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, and Orthodox Christianity. Denominational membership statistics were self-reported estimates and were not completely precise. Sizeable religious minorities included Baptists, Pentecostals, and various evangelical Protestant groups. The once large Jewish community was virtually destroyed in the Holocaust during the 1941–1944 German occupation; the community was an estimated 6,000 to 13,500 persons during the reporting period.

As of April 2006, the Board of Religious Affairs had registered 1,174 congregations. This total included: Lutheran (303), Roman Catholic (250), Orthodox (118), Baptist (93), Old Believer Orthodox (67), Seventh-day Adventist (50), Jehovah's Witnesses (13), Methodist (13), Jewish (13), Buddhist (4), Muslim (15), Hare Krishna (11), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4), and more than 100 other congregations.

Interest in religion increased markedly since the restoration of independence; however, a large percentage of adherents did not regularly practice their faith. In 2005, religious groups provided the following estimates of membership to the Justice Ministry: Lutherans (458,424), Roman Catholics (500,000), Orthodox (350,000), Baptists (7,119), Old Believer Orthodox (2,843), Seventh-day Adventists (3,957), Jeho-

vah's Witnesses (161), Methodists (1,002), Jews (638), Buddhists (87), Muslims (380), Hare Krishnas (127), and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (867). Although no precise statistics existed, it was widely acknowledged that a significant portion of the population was atheist. Orthodox Christians, many of whom were Russian-speaking, non-citizen, permanent residents, were concentrated in the major cities, while many Catholics lived 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 religions. There is no state religion; however, the Government distinguishes between "traditional" (Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believers, Baptists, and Jewish) and "new" religions. In practice, this has not resulted in government discrimination against any particular religion.

Jews are considered an ethnic group and 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 the ethnicity be listed, it is listed on the backside of the bio-page at the front of the passport.

Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter Monday are national holidays. The Orthodox Church has been seeking recognition of Orthodox Christmas for several years, but the Government had not adopted this proposal by the end of this reporting period.

The Latvian Lutheran Church established its own clergy education center, the Luther Academy in Riga, in 1998. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church 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 doctors, academics, and an independent human rights ombudsman. It meets on an ad hoc basis and offers opinions on specific issues, but it does not have decision-making authority. It has not published any information or warnings concerning "cults." The Ecclesiastical Council is an advisory body organized in 2002 by the prime minister and is chaired by either the sitting prime minister or the deputy prime minister. It includes representatives from the major churches: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Orthodox, Jewish, Adventist, Methodist, and Old Believers. The Ecclesiastical Council met during the reporting period to discuss a new draft law on traditional confessions. The draft law outlines which religions are considered traditional religions (those that existed during the country's first period of independence), and further defines the relationship between church and state. Under current law, traditional religions enjoy certain rights and privileges that nontraditional religions do not. It is not clear at this point how the relationship between church and state will be defined and/or changed. The U.S. Embassy will continue to monitor this draft law and report further in the next reporting period.

Although the Government does not require the registration of religious groups, the 1995 Law on Religious Organizations accords religious organizations certain rights and privileges when they register, such as status as a separate legal entity for owning property or other financial transactions, as well as tax benefits for donors. Registration also eases the rules for public gatherings.

According to the 1995 Law on Religious Organizations, any twenty citizens or persons over the age of eighteen who have been registered in the Population Register may apply to register a church. Asylum seekers, foreign staff of diplomatic missions, and those in the country temporarily in a special status may not register a religious organization. Congregations that do not belong to a registered church association must reregister each year for ten 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 semi-autonomous body within the Ministry of Justice. The director of the Board of Religious Affairs reports directly to the Minister of Justice. According to Board of Religious Affairs officials, most registration applications are approved eventually once proper documents are submitted. The Bureau of Human Rights has proposed to abolish the religious association membership requirement and reduce the new congregation registration requirement to three years. By the

end of the reporting period, Parliament had not acted on this recommendation and no legislation has 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 had not registered or been requested to register any offshoots of established religious groups. According to the Board of Religious Affairs, they were not aware of any offshoot Jewish groups who were denied registration. A Chabad-Lubavich organization was registered in 1997. In the past, a group from the Latvian Free Orthodox Church, which was originally denied registration in 1997, was asked in 2005 by the Board to submit their registration request again, but the group had not done so during the reporting period. There were twenty non-associated Old Believer groups registered with the Board during the reporting period.

In 2005, the Religious Affairs Administration again proposed amendments to the Law on Religious Organizations that would abolish restrictions on single association registration. However, neither the Ecclesiastical Council nor the Government had acted on this recommendation by the end of the period covered by this report.

Visa regulations effective since 1999 require foreign religious workers to present either an ordination certificate or evidence of religious education that corresponds to a local bachelor's degree in theology. The visa application process, requiring letters of invitation and proof of seminary training, remained cumbersome, although the Government generally was cooperative in helping resolve difficult visa cases in favor of missionary workers.

Foreign evangelists and missionaries are permitted to hold meetings and to proselytize, but the law stipulates that only domestic religious organizations may invite them to conduct such activities. Foreign religious denominations criticized this provision.

The Law on Religious Organizations stipulates that only representatives of the traditional Christian churches (i.e., Evangelical Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believer, and Baptist churches) may teach religion to public school students who volunteer to take the classes. The Government provides funds for this education. Students at state-supported national minority schools also may receive education on the religion "characteristic of the national minority" on a voluntary basis. Other denominations and religions that do not have their own state-supported minority schools, such as the Jewish community, may provide religious education only in private schools.

Property restitution had been substantially completed, although most religious groups, including the Lutheran, Orthodox, and Jewish communities, continued to wait for the return of some properties. The status of these remaining properties was unclear and 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 Office of the Prime Minister established a working group to address the restitution-related concerns of the country's religious communities. The Jewish community expressed concern about the terms under which some properties were restored.

In early 2006, a law was proposed that would return approximately 200 properties to the Jewish community. The proposal would create a centralized list of all the contested properties and the compensation requested for each item. The Jewish community and the Government continued productive discussions on this issue. By prenegotiating the properties, the community hoped to expedite the legislative process. The Jewish community was optimistic regarding a favorable outcome.

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 2003, vandals overturned tombstones and sprayed anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of Riga's New Jewish Cemetery. National leaders condemned the act and city authorities quickly repaired the damage. Similar desecrations, although on a much smaller scale, occurred in both 2004 and 2005, with similar reactions from leading local citizens. In the spring of 2005, the Orthodox rabbi of Riga was accosted, threatened, and subjected to violently anti-Semitic epithets in Old Town Riga. In late 2005, during the Jewish Hanukkah holiday, vandals deliberately knocked over and broke a large outdoor menorah in Riga.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In early 2006, Latvian police participated in a U.S. Government-sponsored training course to address racial intolerance, which also included a component on anti-Semitism. The course was designed to educate police officers to identify criminal behavior based on intolerance and to explore best practices to combat intolerance on the streets. As a result of this initial course, the Latvian Police Academy incorporated a tolerance training segment into their overall course for new police recruits.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Ecumenism continued to be a new concept in the country, and traditional religions have adopted a distinctly reserved attitude toward the concept. Although government officials encouraged a broader understanding and acceptance of newer religions, many citizens continued to doubt the validity of newer, nontraditional faiths.

The Latvian Historical Commission, under the sponsorship of President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, continued to promote Holocaust awareness throughout society. A monument to Žanis Lipke, who saved forty Jews from the Riga ghetto, was planned for completion in 2006. 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 will hold its first Holocaust Remembrance conference, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and presided over by the president. The conference will address issues relating to the awareness and remembrance of the Holocaust. Participants will include Latvians and delegates from the United States, western Europe, and central and eastern Europe.

Many government leaders—the president in particular—have reacted to a perceived increase in public anti-Semitism by speaking out against all forms of xenophobia and appearing prominently at Holocaust-related commemoration events. The Government actively discourages anti-Semitism, although anti-Semitic sentiments persisted in some segments of society, manifested in occasional public comments and resistance to laws and memorials designed to address Holocaust remembrance. Books and other publications appearing in Latvia that address the World War II period generally dwelt on the effects of the Soviet and Nazi occupations on the state and on ethnic Latvians, sometimes at the expense of comment on the Holocaust or some Latvians' role in it.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by the report, the U.S. embassy worked to support the principle of religious freedom by engaging in regular exchanges with the president, the prime minister, and appropriate government bodies, including the director of the Office of Religious Affairs, human rights nongovernmental organizations, and representatives of various religious confessions, including missionaries. The embassy also held regular discussions with local immigration authorities and section meetings with the Department of Religious Affairs.

The embassy actively supports the Latvian Historical Commission. It has funded the travel of scholars to the United States for education on ethnic and religious tolerance, and of U.S. experts to the country for Historical Commission activities. In addition, the embassy worked with the Government to develop a Holocaust education curriculum for all students in grades 9–12. The embassy funded the training of teachers in curriculum development, the production and publication of a Holocaust education curriculum, and the preparation of teachers to teach Holocaust history and awareness. The completed Holocaust curriculum was published in late spring 2005 and, following teacher training throughout the summer, was implemented in the 2005–2006 school year in some history and social studies classes.

At the end of the summer of 2006, the U.S. Embassy will send two teachers on a U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum study tour. 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.

Embassy officials maintain an open and productive dialogue with the Government's director of the Board of Religious Affairs. Embassy officials also meet regularly with visiting missionary groups as well as representatives of different religious confessions, both local and foreign. Officials often discuss problems that certain mi-

nority religious groups had experienced at the Citizenship and Migration Department when seeking visas and residency permits.

LIECHTENSTEIN

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Roman Catholic Church is the official state church.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 61.7 square miles (160 square kilometers) and, as of 2002, a total population of 33,863, according to the Office of the National Economy. Membership in the different religious communities was as follows: 25,730 Roman Catholics, 2,354 Protestants, 1,384 Muslims, 258 Eastern Orthodox, 72 Buddhists, 31 Jehovah's Witnesses, 18 Jews, 14 Baha'is, 13 Anglicans, 9 New Apostolics, 8 other religions, and 329 with no formal affiliation to any religious community. For 3,643 residents, authorities had no indication of their religious affiliation. As of 2002, the Government discontinued statistics on religious affiliation.

There were no significant foreign missionary groups in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

Church funding comes from the general budget, as decided by Parliament, and is not a direct "tithe" paid by the citizens. The Government gives money not only to the Roman Catholic Church but also to other denominations. Roman 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. In 2006, the Government made a contribution of $20,000 (25,000 Swiss francs) to the Muslim community. The Catholic and Protestant churches' finances are integrated directly into the budgets of the national and local governments. The Roman Catholic Church receives approximately $240,000 (300,000 Swiss francs) per year, plus additional sums from the eleven municipalities. The relationship between the state and the Roman Catholic Church is being redefined. In 2003, the Government reestablished a working group that discussed legislative reform, but the working group has not met since 2004. In 2004, the Government contracted an independent study on church financing reform that is being discussed with local governments. All religious groups enjoy tax-exempt status.

The Archdiocese of Vaduz is scheduled to receive a sum of $2.4 million (3 million Swiss francs) over a total of five years as part of a financial settlement with the Diocese of Chur (Switzerland), to which it belonged until 1997. The transaction will permit the financial separation of the dioceses from one another. The first payment of $800 thousand (1 million Swiss francs) was transferred in December 2003. Additional payments were being made in installments of $320 thousand (400 thousand Swiss francs). The Archdiocese of Vaduz intended to use the funds to pay back its property loan.

In May 2005, the Council of Europe's (COE) Commissioner for Human Rights 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. In 2004, the U.N. Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) also expressed concern about the un-

equal treatment of different religious denominations in the allocation of public funds. The issue of state subsidies to religious communities formed part of the government-sponsored discussions to reach consensus on the redefinition of the relationship between the state and the Roman Catholic Church.

There were no significant foreign missionary groups in the country. To receive a religious-worker visa, an applicant must demonstrate that the host organization is important for the entire country. An applicant must have completed theological studies and be accredited with an acknowledged religious group. Visa requests normally were not denied and were processed in the same manner as requests from other individuals or workers.

Since 2001, the Government has granted 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 Islamic 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 Roman 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, the Protestant Church offers extra-curricular religious education classes with financial support from the Government. Regarding Roman Catholic confessional education at primary schools, a working group representing the local municipalities, religious teachers (catechists), and the Department of Education has worked out an agreement with the archbishop of Vaduz. The agreement retained the compulsory nature of confessional religious education and granted the Roman Catholic Church autonomy in setting the curriculum. With regard to oversight of religious education, the agreement gave the archbishop the final say on employment decisions of religious teachers, including dismissals, and provided for only a complementary supervisory role of the local municipalities. All municipalities except for Balzers, Triesen, and Planken, which decided to retain the old model of religious education, have implemented the agreement. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Protestants were the only other religious community allowed to offer religious education in primary schools. Members of other religious groups were not required to attend these classes. Groups other than the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestants were free to regulate their own religious education.

The Government collaborates with religious institutions by supporting interfaith dialogue and providing adult education courses in religion, as well as other subjects.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy 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 April 2006, a group of fifteen teachers from the country traveled to Israel for a study trip at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial complex. The purpose of the trip was to learn about the Holocaust and methods of teaching its various aspects.

In 2004, the Government established a working group for the better integration of members of the Muslim community into society. The working group consists of representatives of the Muslim community and government officials who deal with Islam as part of their duties. The working group's objectives are to counter mutual prejudices and promote respect and tolerance on the basis of dialogue and mutual understanding. At the working group's suggestion, the Government decided to issue a short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan and, in 2006, to make, for the first time, a contribution of $20,000 (25,000 Swiss francs) to the Muslim community. In cooperation with the national library, the working group

has already made accessible to the public a selection of books in Turkish as well as books on Islam.

The Government's Equal Opportunity Office is charged with handling complaints of religious discrimination, but the office has not yet been contacted 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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Roman Catholics, Protestants, and members of other faiths work well together on an ecumenical basis. Differences among religious faiths are not a significant source of tension in society. There have been no reports of verbal or physical acts against Jewish persons or property. The Jewish community in the country is too small to sustain an organizational structure of its own.

In 2004, the UNHRC expressed concern about the persistence of xenophobia and intolerance, especially against Muslims and persons of Turkish origin.

On January 27, 2006, the Government held a special memorial hour to commemorate the Holocaust. President Otmar Hasler 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. Secondary schools in the country have held discussion fora on the Holocaust on this date since 2003.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy and the foreign office conduct annual discussions of religious freedom issues in preparation for this report.

LITHUANIA

The constitution establishes the right to freedom of religion except where religious observance would violate the constitution or national law, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. There is no state religion. Some religious groups enjoyed government benefits not available to others. Nontraditional religious groups faced some restrictions.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, although members of religious minorities occasionally were subject to acts of intolerance. The media reported instances of anti-Semitic acts, statements, and events. Select media outlets published expressions of intolerance towards religious or ethnic groups. The political leadership of the country publicly criticized anti-Semitic statements when they occurred.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and tolerance and in discussions on the country's strategy for addressing its Holocaust legacy. The U.S. Government sponsored events to promote religious freedom, understanding, and tolerance in the country, including a September 11 commemoration that was the first interfaith service held in the country. The U.S. Government promoted religious freedom and tolerance in several media events throughout the reporting period 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 approximately 3.4 million. Roman Catholicism, the dominant faith in the country prior to the Soviet era, survived years of occupation and remained both dominant and influential. According to the 2001 census, approximately 79 percent (2,686,000) of the inhabitants considered themselves to be Roman Catholics. In May 2006, there were 683 registered Roman Catholic communities and associations (parishes, schools, monasteries, etc). Approximately 140,000 constituted the Eastern Orthodox Church, the country's second largest religious group, with 52 communities mainly along the border with Belarus. Old Believers, numbering 27,000, had 61 registered religious communities. An estimated 20,000 Lutherans belonged to 58 communities, primarily in the southwest. The Evangelical Reformed community had approximately 7,000 members in seventeen communities. The seven Sunni Muslim communities counted approximately 2,700 members, while the Greek Catholic community had approximately 300 members. The Jewish community numbered approximately 4,000. The majority of local Jews were secular, and only about 1,200 belonged to one of the seven religious communities. The Chabad Lubavich, a Hassidic Jewish group, operated a school (kindergarten through twelfth grade), a social center, and a kosher kitchen in the capital of Vilnius.

The Karaites have been in the country since 1397. Karaites, while not unique to the country, exist in few other locations in the world. Karaites speak a Turkic-based language and use the Hebrew alphabet. Some consider Karaites to be a branch of Judaism; the religion is based exclusively on the Old Testament. The Government recognizes the Karaites as a distinct ethnic group. Two houses of worship, one in Vilnius and one in nearby Trakai, serve the Karaite religious community of approximately 250 members. The Karaites' only religious leader is also their community president.

Approximately 0.23 percent of the population belonged to what the Government refers to as "nontraditional" religious communities. The most numerous are the Full Gospel Word of Faith Movement, Pentecostals/Charismatics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and the New Apostolic Church. A total of 1,055 traditional and 173 nontraditional religious associations, centers, and communities have officially registered with the State Register of Legal Entities.

Foreign missionary groups, including Baptists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses, were active in the country.

An estimated 9.4 percent of the population did not identify with any religious denomination. According to 1998 research data, approximately one-third of the country's Roman Catholics attended church services at least once a month. Data on religious participation for members of other faiths were not available.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Article 26 of the constitution provides for the right to religious freedom, 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 two years' imprisonment. Interference with religious ceremonies is also punishable with imprisonment or community service. Inciting religious hatred is punishable by imprisonment of up to three 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 had occasion to invoke these laws.

There is no state religion; however, under the 1995 Law on Religious Communities and Associations, some religious groups enjoy government benefits not available to others, including government 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 buildings, and permits construction of facilities necessary for their activities.

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. In practice, there are four classifications of religious entities: Traditional, state-recognized, registered, and unregistered religious communities and associations.

Government authorities acknowledge as traditional only those religions that can trace their presence in the country back at least 300 years. The law specifies nine traditional religious communities: Latin Rite Catholics, Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed Church, Orthodox Christians (Moscow Patriarchate), Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites.

Traditional religious communities and associations may register marriages; may establish subsidiary institutions; are eligible to receive government assistance; may establish joint private/public schools; and have the right to provide religious instruction in the public schools. Their highest religious leaders are eligible to apply for diplomatic passports, their clergy and theological students are exempt from military service, and they may 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 (VAT) on basic utilities, such as electricity, telephone, and heating.

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 twenty-five 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 fifteen members who are adult citizens of the country. The ministry must review the documents within six months and make a recommendation to Parliament for final approval.

The Baptists were the only state-recognized religion. The Baptists do not receive annual subsidies, tax exemptions, or exemptions from military service enjoyed by traditional communities. In practice, state-recognized religions receive some additional privileges from the Government, but not to the extent that traditional religious groups do. They are entitled to perform marriages and do not have to pay social security and healthcare taxes for clergy and other employees.

The Ministry of Justice's Religious Affairs Department is responsible for processing initial registration applications, but since January 2004 the new State Register of Legal Entities, under the national Registry Center, manages the database of registered religious communities. Religious communities, formerly able to register only in the capital, can now file applications at local registration centers throughout the country. Registration centers forward new applications to the Religious Affairs Department and process renewal registrations locally. New communities affiliated with traditional religions register for free, while nontraditional communities pay a registration fee of $32 (105 litas).

Religious communities must register to obtain official status, which is a requisite for opening a bank account, owning property, or acting in a legal or official capacity as a community.

Unregistered communities have no legal status or state privileges. However, there were no reports that the Government prevented any such groups from worshiping or seeking 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 returned property to religious communities that the Nazi and Soviet occupations had confiscated. The law granted all religious communities equal opportunity to reacquire control of property they once used for religious services. The Roman Catholic community has been more successful in regaining its property than many other religious communities. The Government returned some religious properties, including twenty-eight synagogues to the Jewish community, mostly between 1991 and 1996. The Government successfully resolved a number of claims for restitution; others were pending at the end of the reporting period.

No single government agency addresses the concerns of religious groups. A small department in the Ministry of Justice adjudicates requests of religious groups for registration. The prime minister's advisor for Cultural and Jewish Affairs follows relevant issues within the Jewish community.

Since January 2005, the Office of the Equal Opportunities (OEO) ombudsperson has had the authority to adjudicate complaints about state institutions, educational institutions, places of employment, and products and service sellers and producers that discriminate on a basis of religion (previously, the office heard complaints on sex-discrimination issues only). The OEO ombudsperson 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. The OEO ombudsperson reported no complaints of religious discrimination.

The parliament ombudsperson examines whether state authorities perform their duty to properly serve the people. The law on the parliament ombudsperson specifically notes religious beliefs in defining the functions of the office. The ombudsperson 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. The parliament ombudsperson reported no complaints on grounds of religious beliefs during the reporting period. 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, as amended April 27, 2004, that bars publishing material that "instigates war, national, racial, religious, social and gender hatred." It has the authority to issue administrative fines to newspapers under administrative law or refer cases to law enforcement authorities for criminal prosecution.

In 2000, the Government and the Holy See agreed to establish a military Ordinariat to provide religious support to Roman Catholic members of the military service by means of military chaplains. In 2002, the Ministry of Defense and the Catholic Church signed a regulation on military chaplains' activities. There were sixteen chaplains providing services to the military as of May 2005. The Ministry of Defense provides material support for the Ordinariat and its places of worship. Other traditional churches and religious groups also provide religious support to the military services. The Ordinariat may make requests to the Ministry of Defense to provide religious services for other faiths based on need or requests from service members.

Conscientious objectors may petition for alternative military service within military structures, but there is no option for alternative nonmilitary service, despite requests by members of Jehovah's Witnesses. Persons enrolled in alternative military service must follow military regulations and reside on military installations. They receive assignments to work in nonviolent military roles, such as grounds maintenance, or can work as unskilled laborers in government health or social care institutions.

The constitution establishes that public educational institutions are secular. The Law on Education permits and funds religious instruction only of traditional and state-recognized faiths in public schools. In practice, parents can choose either religious instruction or secular ethics classes for their children. Schools decide which of the traditional religions will be represented in their respective curricula on the basis of requests from parents for children up to age fourteen. (After age fourteen, the pupil decides.) The Ministry of Education and Science had not received any complaints about any school not providing requested religious instruction.

The number of wholly private religious schools in the country is relatively low per capita. There were approximately twenty-five schools with ties to Catholic and Jewish groups, although people of different faiths often attend these schools. Since 2001, 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. The voucher system covers program but not capital costs of school operation. Founders generally bear responsibility for covering capital outlays; however, the Ministry of Education and Science does provide funding for capital costs of traditional religious private schools where an international agreement to do so exists. In 2000, the Government entered into agreement with the Holy See to fully fund private Roman Catholic Schools.

In 2005, religious education in the public schools was provided to 277,000 students (Roman Catholic); 378 (Greek Catholic); 802 (Evangelical Lutheran); 117 (Evangelical Reformed Lutheran); 4,183 (Russian Orthodox); 28 (Old Believer); 249 (Jewish); and 17 (Muslim). A total of 232,000 studied ethics.

Religious holidays include Assumption Day (August 15), St. Mary's celebration (January 1), Easter Monday, All Saints' Day (November 1), Christmas, and Boxing

Day (December 26). There were no reports of formal complaints that these agreements adversely affect religious freedom for the adherents of other religions.

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 2003, the commission investigated the conditions under which religious, esoteric, and spiritual groups may spread their faith via educational institutions. In particular, the commission looked at how many groups were renting premises from public educational institutions. The commission also investigated the alleged involvement of Satanists in the desecration of cemeteries. In 2004, the commission began an investigation of both "magic and the occult on television" and offers of "magical services" by, for example, psychics and astrologers. In May 2005, the local Council of Bishops also raised concerns about "shamanism," and objected also to the municipal government's funding of public Tai Chi classes in Vilnius.

In March 2004, Parliament established a Working Group on Issues of Spiritual and Religious Groups in response to complaints from persons whose relatives had allegedly been harmed by religious "sects." The group reviewed legislation regulating activities of religious groups and aired plans to introduce tougher registration requirements. Following parliamentary debates on "destructive sects and cults," terms that encompass both recognized and unrecognized religious groups, Parliament approved changes to the Criminal Code in July 2004. The changes to the Criminal Code introduced fines and imprisonment of up to three years for religious groups, communities, and centers that use psychological violence to persuade a person or his/her relative to take illegal action or prevent him/her from pursuing legal action.

The Government continued to engage in efforts that foster religious tolerance and understanding. In 2005, Parliament commemorated Holocaust Day by publicly acknowledging and apologizing for the killing of Jews and destruction of Jewish culture in the country during World War II. The Prime Minister attended the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of Holocaust Day in Auschwitz.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

While registered religious communities can act as legal entities, they do not receive regular subsidies, tax exemptions, social benefits, or exemptions from the military enjoyed by traditional communities. In April 2006, the Government allocated $1,171,000 (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 particular type of support, but funds from municipal or other government sources may be available for their use.

Based on an April 27, 2005, decision, the state additionally funds social security and healthcare contributions for spiritual leaders of only traditional and state-recognized religious communities. Other religious communities must pay for these benefits on behalf of their spiritual leaders.

For the fourth consecutive year, Parliament deferred granting "state-recognized religion" status to the United Methodist Church of Lithuania. The Pentecostals (Evangelical Belief Christian Union) applied for state-recognized status in late 2004, and their application was pending parliamentary consideration. The Ministry of Justice recommended the application of the Seventh-day Adventists to Parliament to become a state-recognized religion. At the end of the period covered by the report, there were no final decisions in these three cases.

The Ministry of Justice did not recommend the New Apostolic Church of Lithuania to Parliament for consideration as a state-recognized religion. The ministry argued that the community could not be considered a part of the country's historical, cultural, and social heritage, largely because of its small membership.

Since 1995, the Ministry of Justice has turned down two initial registration applications, those of the Osho Ojas Meditation Center and the Lithuanian Pagans Community (Old Sorcerers). In February 2005, the Government issued a registration permit to the Osho Ojas Meditation Center following the Center's successful appeal of the Ministry's two previous denials.

In 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. The Ministry of Justice expected to submit the amendments to the Parliament in 2006, but progress was slowed by the

collapse of the governing coalition and by disagreements among different Jewish groups within the country.

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 a few incidents of anti-Semitic remarks by extremist politicians during the reporting period. The country's Jewish communities publicly expressed their concerns when anti-Semitic remarks occurred. The political leadership of the country and most media outlets generally criticized anti-Semitic statements when they occurred.

The chairperson of the Jewish Community attributed public expressions of anti-Semitism to ignorance and the failure of society to recognize the extent of the destruction that occurred in the country.

In April 2006, neo-Nazis marked the birthday of National Socialist leader Adolf Hitler by dressing up in SS-style uniforms. A member of Parliament and television commentators denounced the neo-Nazis' acts.

An August 2005 "bulletin" stamped with the Lithuanian Liberty Union (LLU) party's seal urged people not to trust a bank in Lithuania because Latvian Jews allegedly established it. The bank brought suit against the LLU, alleging instigation of ethnic hatred towards Jews, and the State Security Department conducted an investigation. The nonparliamentary LLU has not pursued other such activities, and its leader, former mayor of Kaunas and former MP Vytautas Sustauskas, no longer held public office.

In May 2005, four to six motorcyclists wearing Nazi-style uniforms drove past the Lithuanian Jewish Community headquarters in Vilnius. Members of the community were outside and heard the riders yell Nazi epithets as they drove by. This incident occurred the same day as the opening of the motorcycle season in the country, with more than 700 bikers gathering in a nearby park. The mayor immediately asked the police to look into the incident. Police identified several suspects but did not apprehend anyone. The case remained open.

Fringe and anti-Semitic groups gained attention through public anti-Semitic statements. In April 2005, a Siauliai City Council member founded a nationalist political party with anti-Semitic policies. A plank of the party's platform is to stop the Jewish communal property restitution process. In June 2005, several politicians and government officials immediately and publicly denounced the politician's statements, and the State Security Department recommended bringing charges. At the end of this reporting period, a pre-trial investigation was underway.

Beginning in 2005, international Jewish groups expressed concern about the recent construction of a commercial/residential complex on or near (the matter is in dispute) 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. The Government has opened a dialogue with international Jewish groups to address concerns about development plans for the area.

In April 2004, the police launched an investigation into the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in the Kaisiadorys region; they had not found any of the perpetrators at the end of the period covered by this report. The case remained open.

In February 2004, the popular national daily Respublika carried a series of editorials with obvious anti-Semitic overtones, under the title "Who Rules the World?" Government officials at the highest levels condemned the publication of the series and the anti-Semitic sentiments therein, but the Jewish community and others criticized the Government for responding too slowly. Local nongovernmental organizations and representatives of other religious groups similarly denounced the anti-Semitic articles. The Prosecutor General's Office and the State Security Department launched pretrial investigations over incitement of ethnic and racial hatred by Respublika's editor-in-chief. In April 2004, Parliament formed a working group to strengthen legislation prohibiting incitement of discord, anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia. In January 2005, the Journalist Ethics Inspectorate fined Respublika $2,200 (6,000 litas) for ethical lapses. In February 2005, the Prosecutor General's Office dropped the investigation, but then quickly resumed it at the urging of the president and senior government officials. In May 2005, a Vilnius administrative court fined the editor-in-chief of the Russian-language version of Respublika $370

(1,000 litas) for dissemination of a publication that instigates national, racial or religious discord. Prosecutors also pursued the editor and owner of Respublika, but the Supreme Administrative Court in September 2005 terminated the case against the editor and cancelled a fine of $1,200 (3,000 litas). The Supreme Administrative Court annulled the ruling on a "double-jeopardy" principle as the prosecutors were simultaneously pursuing both administrative and criminal punishment for violation of the same law. In November, the Prosecutor General's Office petitioned the Supreme Administrative Court to reconsider the case against the paper's editor and owner. The case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Anti-Semitic comments also occurred on unscreened Internet blogs.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by the report, the state register of legal entities registered ten religious communities, one nontraditional and nine traditional religious communities. The state did not deny registration to any applicant religious group.

Since early 2004, the Ministry of Justice had delayed registration of a Unification Church community in response to parental protests and the objections of a self-proclaimed "anti-cult" group. After reviewing the evidence against the Church, the Ministry determined that the protesters' claims of abuse on the part of the Unification Church in Lithuania were baseless and issued the registration permit in January 2005.

In June 2005, the Jounalist Ethics Inspectorate established a new edition of the Code of Journalist Ethics barring journalists and public information producers from insulting a person on the basis of religious beliefs.

In September 2005, the Constitutional Court upheld a decision of the Government to close a Chechen web site for inciting ethnic and religious hatred.

In October 2005, Siauliai Prosecutors brought charges of inciting religious hatred against seven individuals for disrupting a menorah celebration in Siauliai in 2003. The court heard from witnesses in January 2006, and the case continued.

In September 2004, the president awarded the Life Saving Cross to fifty-five persons who worked to save Jews during the Holocaust. He commended their selflessness and recognized the substantial number of people who perished during the Holocaust.

The Government continued its efforts to support post-World War II restitution efforts. In February 2005, the Government reiterated its commitment to Jewish property restitution during meetings with the Jewish Community. In November 2004, the Vilnius city government participated in erecting a monument at the site of a former Jewish cemetery.

Following a Klaipeda district court ruling overturning fines and one-year jail sentences for two members of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Government organized a working group to explore the possibility of introducing alternative service in nonmilitary structures for conscientious objectors. The working group found that twenty-three of the twenty-five recent conscientious objectors accepted service in noncombatant military positions. Rather than create a separate program of alternative nonmilitary service for the few conscientious objectors, the Government decided to waive their military service obligation.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relations among various religious communities in society contributed to religious freedom, although members of religious minorities occasionally were targets of acts of intolerance, such as insults.

Disputing factions within some religious communities, for example within evangelical, Old Believer, and Jewish communities, periodically appealed to official authorities and courts to limit the activities of their rivals, sometimes by opposing a certain faction's registration as a religious community. The Government attempted not to involve itself in internal disputes of religious communities. In April and June 2003, however, Vilnius administrative courts ruled to create separate new Old Believer communities in response to a conflict within the Old Believer community. In May 2004, the Jewish community temporarily closed the Vilnius synagogue following a disorderly dispute in the synagogue between members of the Orthodox and the Chabad Lubavich Jewish groups. The community closed the synagogue again in August 2004, following another disturbance. The Government charged the leader of the Chabad Lubavich community with assault and trespassing in the second occurrence, but subsequently dropped the charges. The synagogue remained closed pending resolution of the community's internal disputes.

Activities of some nontraditional religions raised concerns within segments of society. Since 2003, for example, some parents opposed their children's membership in

the Unification Church and protested the registration of a second Unification Church community. (The first community was registered in 1993.) The ministry approved the registration in January 2005.

An estimated 10 percent of the pre-World War II population was Jewish. More than 200,000 Jews (approximately 95 percent of the immediately prewar Jewish population) died as victims of the Holocaust. The country is still working to understand its past better and to make just recompense for its Holocaust legacy. In 1998, President Valdas Adamkus established a historical commission to investigate crimes of both the Holocaust and the subsequent Soviet occupation. The commission has held annual conferences and several seminars, published several reports, and cosponsored a Holocaust education program.

In February 2006, the newspaper Respublika reprinted caricatures of Muhammad, previously published in the Danish press, drawing sharp criticism from religious leaders of all faiths and from government leaders. The incident was under investigation as a violation of the Public Information Law but no charges were filed by the end of the period covered by this report.

In September 2005, Respublika ran a series of articles attacking the work of the Soros-funded Open Society Institute. The London Economist noted the "new attacks are also aimed at religious and political figures only indirectly connected with the Soros foundation."

SECTION IV. U.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, members of Parliament, and presidential advisors, as well as continual contact with religious leaders. Religious groups used the embassy as a vehicle to voice their complaints, and the embassy encouraged religious leaders to share their views on the status of religious freedom and to raise complaints. The embassy was active in discussing the restitution of Jewish communal property with government officials and community leaders in the country. The embassy also maintained regular contact with U.S. missionary groups.

The ambassador publicly criticized anti-Semitic statements in the media and encouraged a similar response from the highest officials of the Government. The embassy also maintained close relations with the Jewish community to monitor the situation.

On September 11, 2005, the embassy organized an interfaith service to commemorate those who lost their lives as a result of ethnic and religious intolerance and terrorism. Roman Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Muslims, Jews, Orthodox adherents, and Mormons attended the service, as did the ambassador, his counterparts from Russia, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, and President Adamkus. The nationally televised event was the first public ecumenical service ever held in the country.

On October 20, 2005, the embassy hosted a seminar "Mainstreaming equality and diversity: Opening the debate with media," which aimed to promote better understanding between the media and national ethnic and religious minorities in the country. Attendees included religious community representatives, the media, and government officials. The ambassador opened the event, and the director general of the Department of National Minorities, the deputy chairman of Parliament, the inspector of journalist ethics, and other experts delivered remarks.

The embassy funded a number of projects with the goal of promoting greater religious tolerance, particularly projects related to building broader understanding of the Holocaust. The ambassador regularly spoke on tolerance issues and hosted a roundtable focusing on tolerance and Holocaust issues at the American Center in May 2005, attended by high school students and members of various religious communities. In the summers of 2004 and 2005, two secondary school teachers participated in a teacher-training initiative in the U.S. that sought to promote and develop Holocaust education. Lithuanian participation is also anticipated in 2006.

In April 2005, the embassy released a public statement condemning anti-Semitism after a politician announced the creation of a nationalist, anti-Semitic political party.

The embassy continually engaged government officials at all levels on issues relating to religious freedom. In March 2004, in response to anti-Semitic articles published in Respublika, the ambassador raised his concerns with the vice-minister of foreign affairs. The embassy also released several public statements, and the ambassador gave interviews condemning the articles. Following such criticism from U.S. and European Union diplomatic representatives, high-level government officials

stepped up their condemnation of the articles and of anti-Semitism in general. The foreign minister and prime minister mentioned their concern for the country's international image in their censure of the articles and in calls for a criminal investigation of Respublika's editor-in-chief.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 999 square miles and a population of approximately 460 thousand. The country is historically Roman Catholic, and Catholicism remained the predominant faith. According to a 1979 law, the Government may not collect or maintain statistics on religious affiliation; however, more than 90 percent of the population was estimated to be baptized Catholic. The Lutheran and Calvinist churches were the largest Protestant denominations. Muslims were estimated to number approximately 9,000 persons, including approximately 900 refugees from Montenegro; Orthodox Christian (Greek, Serbian, Russian, and Romanian) adherents were estimated to number 5,000 persons; and there were approximately 1,000 Jews. The Baha'i Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Universal Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses were represented in smaller numbers. The number of professed atheists reportedly was growing.

There were no significant foreign missionary groups. Many religious groups described as "sects" were represented in the country. They were expected to obey the law, but their activities did not produce significant political or social concerns.

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 the salaries and pensions of clergy of those religious groups which sign conventions with the Government. Pursuant to negotiated agreements with the Government, the following religious groups receive such support: Catholic, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Jewish, and some other Protestant denominations. In 2003, the Romanian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, and Anglican churches also concluded conventions with the Government.

An application for financial support for the Muslim community has been under consideration for more than eight years. In late 2003, the Muslim community named a national representative and single interlocutor, which allowed discussions over the convention to proceed. Once signed, the convention would allow the Muslim community to receive government funding. Although the minister of religion set a goal for conclusion of the convention by the end of 2006, there was no agreement by the end of the reporting period. For the convention to be completed, the Government requires the Muslim community to fully respect the constitution, including the equal treatment of men and women.

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.

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 two school 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. Although approximately 81 percent of primary school students choose religious instruction, the number drops to 57 percent for high school students.

The Government subsidizes private religious schools. All private, religious, and nonsectarian schools are eligible for and receive government subsidies if the religious group concluded a convention with the state. The Government also subsidizes a Catholic seminary.

In 2004, the Government launched a pilot program in one high school that provides nondenominational values education, highlighting the principal world religious groups and schools of thought. This program was developed in consultation with the Catholic Church and Muslim community, among others, and, after five years, it is intended to be made universal in the country's school system.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious 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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim faiths worked well together on an interfaith basis. Differences among religious groups were not a significant source of tension in society. There were no reports of verbal or physical violence against Jewish persons or property during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its policy to promote human rights. The embassy's human rights officer met with representatives of several government ministries at a working level to discuss matters related to religious freedoms. The ministries were cooperative interlocutors, who spoke openly about the relationship between religious groups and the Government. The human rights officer also met with representatives from religious groups and nongovernmental organizations, none of whom voiced any concern over the state of religious freedom in the country.

MACEDONIA

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

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The absence of provocative actions by state and nonstate actors, and ongoing government efforts to consolidate a unitary, multiethnic state helped foster a climate of general respect for religious freedom. However, the law places some limits on religious practice by restricting the registration of religious groups. During the period covered by this report, these restrictions were applied to a small group aligned with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which denies the ecclesiastical independence of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

The generally amicable relationship among the various religious groups contributed to religious freedom. However, the ongoing dispute between the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox churches has intensified in recent years after the Serbian Orthodox Church rejected the legitimacy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and instead recognized a small splinter group as the "only canonical" church in Macedonia. The Serbian government was found to have financially supported this group, known as the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid." The Government, with general support from the majority of the public, openly sided with the Macedonian Orthodox Church in the long-running dispute.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 9,781 square miles and a population of 2,071,200. The country's two major religions were Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Nominally, 65 percent of the population was Macedonian Orthodox, 32 percent was Muslim, 1 percent was Roman Catholic, and 2 percent was of other faiths (largely various Protestant denominations). There was also a small Jewish community, with the majority of its members residing in Skopje. Public participation in religious activities centered on major holidays, weddings, and funerals.

Numerous foreign missionaries were active and represented a wide range of faiths. Many of these missionaries entered the country in connection with other work, often charitable or medical. Several Protestant missionary groups and members of Jehovah's Witnesses were active.

There was a general correlation between ethnicity and religion. The majority of Orthodox believers were ethnic Macedonian, and the majority of Muslim believers were ethnic Albanian.

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 the establishment of places of worship, the collection of contributions, and locations where religious rites may be held.

The 1997 Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups further defines the constitutional provision for religious freedom. This law designates the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, the Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish Community, and the Methodist Church as religious communities. All other registered religious associations are considered to be religious groups. In 1998 and 1999, the Constitutional Court struck down several provisions of the 1997 law, including the requirement that religious groups must be registered to perform religious ceremonies. In practice, the remaining provisions were not enforced consistently.

The law requires that religious groups be registered to perform a number of activities. For instance, only registered religious groups may obtain permits to build churches or request visas for foreigners coming to the country to undertake religious work. The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups contained a number of specific requirements for the registration of such groups; the Constitutional Court struck down these requirements in 1999. Consequently, there is considerable confusion over which registration procedures still apply. The law prohibits the registration of more than one group for each religious confession. The law provides for penalties against any person or group that restricts a citizen's right to join a religious group or participate in religious rituals.

Orthodox Easter and Christmas are observed as national holidays. Muslim and Jewish religious holidays are not national holidays, but they are recognized as required holidays for believers of those faiths.

Regulations require that foreigners entering the country with the intent to carry out religious work or perform religious rites obtain approval from the State Commission on Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups to receive a visa. When applying for visas, such persons must submit a letter of invitation from representatives of a registered religious group in the country to the Commission, which then issues a letter of approval to be submitted with the visa request.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups places some restrictions on the locations where religious ceremonies may be held. It provides that religious rites and religious activities "shall take place at churches, mosques, and other temples, and in gardens that are parts of those facilities, at cemeteries, and at other facilities of the religious group." Provision is made for holding services in other places, provided that a permit is obtained from the State Commission on Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups at least fifteen 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 on Religious Communities and Religious Groups also places some limitations on the collection of contributions by restricting it to places where religious rites and activities are conducted. In practice, these provisions of the law were not enforced.

Education laws restrict the establishment of all private primary schools, including parochial schools. However, there are no restrictions placed on religious education that takes place in religious spaces such as churches and mosques. Children below the age of ten years may not receive religious instruction without the permission of their parents or legal guardians.

In May 2005 the Ministry of Justice released a new draft law on religious communities and groups. The draft law proposed a transfer of the responsibility for registering religious groups to the judiciary from the State Commission on Relations with the Religious Communities and Groups. The draft law was submitted to the Ministry of Justice in March 2006. At the end of the reporting period the draft law was under interagency review prior to being submitted to Parliament.

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 Macedonian Orthodox Church's self-declared autocephaly (ecclesiastical independence, which is not recognized by other Orthodox churches). Led by a defrocked Macedonian Orthodox Church Bishop, Zoran Vraniskovski, this schismatic group is recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church as an archbishopric.

In November 2004 the State Commission on Relations with the Religious Communities denied the registration application of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid." It cited a number of grounds for the denial, noting that under the law only one group may be registered for each confession, and arguing that the name "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" was not sufficiently distinct from that of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which is also known as the Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid and Macedonia. Similar arguments were used to reject three registration applications for small Christian groups using the names "Free Protestant Church," "Good News Church," and "Reformist Movement of Adventists" during the period covered by this report. The appeal to the Supreme Court by the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid," which followed two unsuccessful administrative appeals, was still under consideration at the end of the period covered by this report.

In July 2004, Zoran Vraniskovski, recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church as Archbishop Jovan of Ohrid, was convicted in a Bitola court of "inciting religious and ethnic hatred." In June 2005, an appeals court upheld the verdict and Vraniskovski reported to prison in July 2005. In February 2006, the Supreme Court reduced his sentence to time served, and he was released from prison in March 2006. Following his release from prison, a representative of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" told an embassy official that government officials had refused to return Vraniskovski's passport. Government officials cited his pending sentence for embezzlement as the reason for refusing to return his passport.

The February 2006 Supreme Court decision also suspended Vraniskovski's one-year prison sentence for "falsely assuming religious authority." This conviction stemmed from an incident in 2003, when Vraniskovski attempted to baptize his niece at a Macedonian Orthodox church; authorities claimed his attempt to do so constituted trespassing, since he earlier had been defrocked by the Macedonian Orthodox Church and therefore was not authorized to perform religious rites in that church.

In addition to these charges, Vraniskovski faced two charges of embezzlement. The first charge was for embezzling $72,000 (57,000 euros) donated to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. In September 2005, the local Veles Court found him guilty of misappropriating funds and sentenced him to two years in prison. In March 2006, the Skopje Appeals Court reduced this sentence to one year, taking into account his return of the money to the Church as a mitigating circumstance. Vraniskovski appealed this decision to the Supreme Court, and no decision had been made by June 2006. In May 2006, media reported that Vraniskovski had traveled to Belgrade to meet with Serbian Orthodox Church officials. This caused speculation in the media that Vraniskovski had obtained Serbian citizenship, as the Government was still in possession of his Macedonian passport, as mentioned above. Vraniskovski was summoned to report to prison by June 19, 2006, to serve the reduced sentence in the embezzlement case. However, he did not report by the specified date, and media reported that Vraniskovski was admitted to a Belgrade hospital on June 26 because of "deteriorated health." By the end of the period covered by this report, Vraniskovski had not reported to prison, and the police had not issued a warrant for his arrest.

In April 2006 Vraniskovski was acquitted on the second embezzlement charge involving $410,000 (324,000 euros) allegedly taken from Macedonian Orthodox Church funds while he was still a bishop with the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

In May 2006 local media reported that the Serbian Orthodox Church had appealed to President Crvenkovski to pardon Vraniskovski as a condition for resuming talks between the Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox churches. In June 2006, media reported that Crvenkovski had rejected this appeal, citing the damaging effect a pardon for the embezzlement conviction would have on the rule of law.

A priest with the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" reported that he was beaten because of his beliefs and that his home, where he performed liturgies, was vandalized in July 2005. Members of the group alleged that, following this incident, police officers discouraged them from reporting future acts of violence or vandalism.

Representatives of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" alleged that in May 2005 police entered a private residence without a warrant, interrupting an Easter service, and asked to see believers' national identification cards. This report could not be independently confirmed. "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" representatives also alleged that in January 2005 at least two of their followers were summoned to the police station in Prilep and were questioned about their support for the group. Complaints regarding the Prilep incident were lodged with the Ministry of Interior's Professional Standards Unit, which, following an investigation, found the police action justified. A secondary school teacher associated with the group in Veles reported that police questioned her students about her teaching, and asked whether she was spreading church propaganda.

Vraniskovski's residence was vandalized in February 2004, and unknown intruders forcibly cut the hair of several nuns present. He claimed the attackers were state agents, but some speculated that his followers staged the attack to generate international sympathy. The alleged intruders were never identified.

The 1997 Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups specifically allows foreign citizens to carry out religious activities, but only at the request of a registered religious body and provided the foreign citizen obtains the appropriate visa. During the period covered by this report no visa applications for religious workers were denied; approvals for these visas typically were issued in less than a week.

In September 2004 a Polish-born nun associated with the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" claimed that the Ministry of Interior declined to extend her residency permit because of her affiliation with that group. Since the law prevents registration of more than one group for each confession, the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" has been denied registration and is thus not legally entitled to sponsor foreign religious workers. Followers of the church reported that the nun currently enters the country as a tourist and therefore may not remain in the country continuously for a period longer than ninety days.

Churches and mosques often are built without the appropriate building permits; however, the Government normally does not take action against religious buildings that lack them. In the past, several Protestant groups have been unable to obtain building permits for new church facilities because of bureaucratic complications that affect all new construction, religious or secular. Some local human rights organizations stated that religious groups who reported trouble obtaining building permits often had not followed the proper legal procedures for obtaining a permit.

In October 2004 policemen demolished a small monastery that was being built by members of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" in Nizepole, near Bitola. The organization's lawyer conceded that the monastery was being constructed without a permit but noted that other buildings in the area, also built without permits, were not destroyed. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) was unable to obtain a copy of the decision by the competent ministry authorizing the monastery's destruction.

The issue of restitution of religious properties expropriated by the former Yugoslav government had not been fully resolved. Many churches and mosques had extensive grounds or other properties that were expropriated by the communist regime. Some progress was made in restitution of previously state-owned religious property. Almost all churches and many mosques have been returned to the ownership of the appropriate religious community, but that was not the case for most of the other properties. Restitution or compensation claims often are complicated by the fact that the seized properties have changed hands many times or have been developed. The Islamic Community of Macedonia claimed it was not able to regain rightful use of several mosques that the Government was to have returned to it. In addition, the Islamic Community alleged that the Government in some cases delayed the process of restitution by selling or starting new construction on disputed property and questioning the historical legal claim of the Islamic Community to religious properties.

The Jewish community continued to work with the Government for the full restitution of property confiscated by the former Yugoslav government. In 1996, the Jewish Community first submitted a proposal to the Government for restitution of community property. The Law on Denationalization, however, was not passed until 2000, and in 2001 all community property was fully restituted. The agreement included four pieces of property and two buildings in Bitola and one piece of property and a building in Skopje. In addition the community received bonds valued at $3.5 million (2.8 million euros). The Jewish community is the only religious community in Macedonia whose community property has been fully restituted. However, the process of individual property restitution has been slow in large part because of the extensive documentation required to show the chain of ownership and lack of heirs. In 2004, the Holocaust Fund of the Jews from Macedonia, which regulates restitution to individual Holocaust victims without heirs, successfully settled twenty-four cases, returning to the Fund a large piece of property in the old Jewish section of Skopje. In September 2005, construction began on the returned property for a Memorial Holocaust Center for the Jews from Macedonia. There was slow but noticeable progress during the period covered by this report; approximately 450 cases are in the settlement process with the Government, and 1,000 cases remain to be documented and resolved.

The Bektashi, a Sufi Islamic group, sued the Government for failing to reverse the former Yugoslavia's nationalization of the Bektashis' Tetovo compound, known as the Arabati Baba Tekke. The Bektashi also filed suit against the Islamic Community of Macedonia (ICM), armed members of which seized part of the complex in 2002; the ICM continued to occupy the mosque. The Islamic Community claimed that the property belongs to them, as the Bektashi are a sect of Islam; however, the Bektashi in Macedonia have registered as a separate religious group and claim that the property belongs strictly to the Bektashi Community and not the Islamic community as a whole. These disputes were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Zoran Vraniskovski was considered by some human rights organizations to be a religious prisoner. He was in prison from July 2005 to March 2006, but was free at the end of the period covered by this report.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The February 2006 Supreme Court decision reducing Zoran Vraniskovski's prison sentence led to his release from prison, after which there were no cases of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Restitution of property according to denationalization laws moved forward. Construction began on a Memorial Holocaust Center on a piece of property restituted to the Jewish community in 2005 using funds from bonds received from the Government.

In May 2006 a dispute over approving the construction of a Catholic church in the village of Sekirnik was resolved when officials from the Macedonian Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, and Government worked together with the citizens of Sekirnik to ensure the proper permits were obtained. Subsequently, construction of the church began unhindered.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, and prominent religious leaders frequently spoke out in support of pluralism and religious tolerance. However, the continued rejection of the Macedonian Orthodox Church's independence, by the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" and the Serbian Orthodox Church, provoked angry responses by the public, press, and Government, who view this rejection as an attack on the country's national identity.

Religious differences in the country often correspond with ethnic identity. Specifically, most Muslims are ethnic Albanians. However, there are a number of ethnic Macedonians who are Muslim. During the reporting period there were no reports of religious discrimination or prejudice related to ethnic Macedonian Muslims.

Representatives of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" said that a number of their members or sympathizers suffered from discrimination during the reporting

period. A student in the theology department in Skopje reported that he was asked to leave the school after attending a Serbian Orthodox liturgy. The school, however, is a private institution run by the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which maintains it has the right to admit or reject students as it sees fit. There was one unverified report that a journalist in Skopje was fired after writing about religious freedom restrictions in the country.

The Bektashi reported two acts of vandalism at the compound in Tetovo. In April 2006, a large photograph of Reshat Bardhi, head of the World Bektashi Community, which hung at the entrance to the compound, was reported stolen. The photograph was replaced and, in May 2006, it was vandalized when the middle of the photograph was cut out. The police investigations into both of these incidents were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

During the period covered by this report, there were isolated reports of Orthodox churches being vandalized. The Macedonian Orthodox Church considered these acts to be incidents of petty theft and did not believe that they were motivated by religious beliefs or discrimination.

Jewish leaders reported that there were no physical or verbal attacks against Jewish persons or property 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.

During the period covered by this report, the ambassador and embassy staff met with leaders and representatives of the various religious communities, as well as with government officials, to address religious freedom issues and to support the Government's policy of ethnic and religious tolerance.

The ambassador and other embassy representatives continued to follow the developments in the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid" case, in coordination with OSCE and the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The ambassador and other embassy officials discussed the issue with the president, prime minister, Macedonian Orthodox Church officials, and representatives of the "Orthodox Archbishopric of Ohrid." On each occasion, the embassy 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, the enthronement of the new Catholic bishop of Skopje, and a meeting organized by the country's president to positively engage religious leaders in the 2006 parliamentary elections.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country is an archipelago, consisting of three inhabited islands in the Mediterranean Sea, and has an area of 122 square miles. Its population was approximately 400 thousand. The overwhelming majority of citizens (approximately 95 percent as of 2004) were Roman Catholic, and approximately 63 percent (2004 estimates) attended services regularly. All or almost all of the country's political leaders were 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 were not Maltese but rather some of the many British retirees who live in the country or vacationers from many other nations. Of the Protestant churches in the country, the Church of England had a congregation of about 270 members; the united congregations of the Presbyterian and Methodist Church numbered 120; and the Evangelical Church of Ger-

many had approximately 70 members. There was also a union of sixteen groups of Evangelical churches with approximately 500 members in all, which included the Pentecostal and other nondenominational churches. There were approximately 680 Jehovah's Witnesses, 115 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and 30 members of the Bible Baptist Church. There was a Jewish congregation with approximately one hundred members. Zen Buddhism had approximately ten adherents and the Baha'i Faith had approximately thirty members. There was one Islamic mosque and a Muslim primary school. Of the estimated 3,000 Muslims in the country, approximately 2,250 were foreigners, 600 were naturalized citizens, and 150 were native-born citizens. An estimated 2 percent of the population did not formally practice any religion, including those who were 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 from 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 foundation was established in 1991 as a result of the transfer from the church to the state of properties not set aside for pastoral use under the 1991 Ecclesiastical Entities Act.

The Government subsidized children living in church-sponsored residential homes.

There was one Muslim private school with approximately 120 students. In 2005, work began on a projected 500-grave Muslim cemetery.

There are six 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. These holidays did not negatively affect any religious groups.

Since 1991, all religious organizations have had similar legal rights. Religious organizations can own property such as buildings, and their ministers can perform marriages and other functions. While religious instruction in Catholicism is compulsory in all state schools, the constitution establishes the right not to receive this instruction if the student or parent or guardian objects, and this right is respected in practice.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Roman Catholic Church makes its presence and its influence felt in everyday life; however, non-Catholics, including converts from Catholicism, do not face legal or societal discrimination. Relations between the Catholic Church and non-Catholic religious groups are characterized by respect and cooperation. Proselytism by practitioners of non-Catholic faiths is conducted freely and openly. To promote tolerance, school curricula include studies in human rights, ethnic relations, and cultural diversity as a part of values education for students. Religious groups are not required to be licensed or registered.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy advocates continued observance of basic human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Both the embassy's private discussions with government officials and its informational programs for the public consistently emphasize these points.

Through a variety of public affairs programs, the embassy continued to work with different sectors of society, including religious groups, to promote interfaith dialogue, religious freedom, and tolerance. Among the embassy's initiatives during the period covered by this report was increased outreach to the local chapter of the World Islamic Call Society and other members of the Muslim community and Muslim students enrolled at the University of Malta. The embassy also had regular contact with the country's small 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.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to uphold its earlier decisions to deny some groups registration. In March 2006 a court ordered the State Service for Religions (SSR) to register the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); however, the SSR appealed the ruling. In the separatist region of Transnistria, which is not controlled by the Government, authorities continued to deny registration to and harassed a number of minority religious groups.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, disputes among different branches of the Christian Orthodox faith continued, and there were some reports of Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses experiencing harassment from local town councils, as well as from Orthodox priests and adherents.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Specifically, the U.S. embassy raised concerns at the highest levels of the Government regarding the persistent registration difficulties faced by some religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately thirteen thousand square miles, and its population, including Transnistria, is an estimated 3.9 million. The Migration Department estimates that between 500 thousand and one million citizens have left the country to work abroad since independence in 1991. Common destination countries include Russia, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece, the United Kingdom, and Ireland.

The predominant religion was Christian Orthodox. More than 90 percent of the population nominally belonged to either of two Orthodox denominations. According to the SSR, the Moldovan Orthodox Church (MOC) had 1,255 parishes, and the Bessarabian Orthodox Church (BOC) included 219 parishes. The BOC was formed in 1992 by priests who broke away from the MOC. It was officially recognized in 2002. In addition followers of the Old Rite Russian Orthodox Church (Old Believers) made up approximately 3.6 percent of the population. The True Orthodox Church of Moldova continued to be refused registration. The religious traditions of the Orthodox churches are entwined with the culture and patrimony of the country. Many self-professed atheists routinely celebrate religious holidays and observe Orthodox practices if local tradition and the occasion demand.

Adherents of other faiths included Roman Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, Jews, followers of Reverend Moon, Molokans (a Russian group), Messianic Jews (who believe that Jesus was the Messiah), Lutherans, Presbyterians, Hare Krishnas, and some other charismatic Christian and evangelical Christian groups. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) had two congregations, with an estimated 250 members. According to the most recent statistics from the Israeli cultural center in Chisinau, the Jewish community had approximately 25,000 members, including 15,000 in Chisinau; 2,500 in Balti and surrounding areas; 1,600 in Tiraspol; 1,000 in Bender; and 4,000 in small towns.

Foreign missionaries represented many faiths and denominations.

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 (adopted in 1992 and amended in 1999 and 2002) contains restrictions that inhibited activities of unregis-

tered religious groups. The law provides for freedom of religious practice, including each person's right to profess in any form his or her religion. It also protects the confidentiality of the confessional, allows denominations to establish associations and foundations, and states that the Government may not interfere in the religious activities of denominations. The law specifies that "in order to organize and function," religious organizations must be registered with the Government. Unregistered groups may not own property, engage employees, or obtain space in public cemeteries in their own names.

There is no state religion; however, the MOC receives favored treatment from the Government. The Metropolitan of Chisinau and all Moldova is issued a diplomatic passport. Other high-ranking MOC officials also reportedly have diplomatic passports.

The procedures for registering a religious organization are the same for all groups. To register, a religious organization must present a declaration of creation, by-laws, and an explanation of its basic religious beliefs to the SSR. The SSR enters the religious organization into the register of religions within thirty working days. At the request of the SSR, 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 by-laws any provisions that would violate the constitution or any other laws.

The Government has recognized and registered twenty-one religious organizations, many of which have subentities throughout the country. Although amendments to the law on religions adopted in 2002 were intended to simplify the registration process and make it essentially automatic, the SSR continues to deny registration to the Spiritual Organization of Muslims, the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Moldova, and the True Orthodox Church of Moldova. Beginning in 2000, the Mormons tried repeatedly to register with the SSR. On March 28, 2006, the Chisinau Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the Mormons and ordered the SSR to register the church. On May 25, 2006, the SSR appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of Justice. By the end of the period covered by this report, the appeal had not come before the court.

In 1999 an amendment to the law on religions legalized proselytizing; however, the law explicitly forbids "abusive proselytizing," which is defined as an attempt to influence an individual's religious faith through violence or abuse of authority. During the period covered by this report, the authorities did not take legal action against any individual for such proselytizing.

A draft of the law on religions, introduced in 2002, was revised to remove numerous restrictive measures. The Council of Europe reviewed the draft law, which passed its first reading in Parliament on December 22, 2005. By the end of the period covered by this report, the law had not come before Parliament for a second reading.

By the end of the period covered by this report, the 2003 law on combating extremism had not been used against any religious groups or opposition organizations.

The criminal code permits punishment for "preaching religious beliefs or fulfillment of religious rituals which cause harm to the health of citizens, or other harm to their persons or rights, or instigate citizens not to participate in public life or in the fulfillment of their obligations as citizens." No organization was prosecuted under this code during the period covered by this report.

Article 200 of the administrative offenses code prohibits any religious activities of registered or unregistered religious groups that violate current legislation. The article also allows the expulsion of foreign citizens who engage in religious activities without the consent of authorities. In 2004 the Spiritual Organization of Muslims reported being fined under the article for holding religious services in a location registered to a charitable organization. The Government charged that its activities were not in line with the stated activities and purposes of the charitable organization. Foreign volunteers from the Mormon Church have also been charged under this article with working illegally for an unregistered religious organization.

Foreign missionaries may enter the country for ninety days on a tourist visa. They experience the same bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining residence permits and customs clearances as other foreign workers who wish to stay in the country for longer periods.

On April 6, 2006, the law on entry and exit was amended by Parliament, limiting the stay of foreigners to ninety days in a six-month period. However, foreign missionaries may obtain an "immigration certificate" and residence permit from the National Bureau for Migration if they can demonstrate that they are locally employed. This amendment proved problematic for missionaries who were working in the country on a volunteer basis.

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." These schools receive the same funding as other state schools and are supplemented financially by the community. However, Jewish students are not restricted to these schools. Total enrollment for Jewish schools was approximately 550.

The law provides for restitution of property that was confiscated during successive fascist and Soviet regimes to politically repressed or exiled persons. This regulation also extends to all religious communities; however, in practice the MOC has been favored over other religious groups. The MOC has recovered nearly all of its property, and in cases where property was destroyed, the Government offered alternative compensation. The recovered property included churches, schools, hospitals, orphanages, and administrative properties. Property disputes between the Moldovan and Bessarabian Orthodox churches have not been resolved. According to Jewish community representatives, there was no consistent restitution being undertaken on their behalf in the country, nor were there any ongoing restitution claims by individuals.

The authorities in Transnistria also impose registration requirements that negatively affect religious groups and have denied registration to some groups. In 2004 the Transnistrian Supreme Soviet considered a new draft law on religions, which reportedly contained numerous contentious provisions. However, it abandoned the initiative in 2005, after the Orthodox bishop of Tiraspol and some legislators objected strongly to the draft; the 1995 law on religions remains in force.

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.

Unregistered religious organizations are not permitted to buy land or obtain construction permits for churches or seminaries. In some cases, members of unregistered religious groups held services in homes, nongovernmental organization (NGO) offices, and other locations. In other cases, the groups obtained property and permits in the names of individual members. Individual churches or branches of officially registered religious organizations are not required to register with local authorities; however, a branch must register locally in order to carry out legal transactions and receive donations.

In February 2004 the Supreme Court overturned the Government's 2001 decision that made the MOC the successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church for purposes of all property ownership. In April 2004 the Supreme Court rescinded its ruling, in response to an appeal submitted by the Government. The Bessarabian Orthodox Church (BOC), which regards itself as the legal and canonical successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church, contested the latter decision and in May 2004 submitted the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), where it awaited examination at the end of the reporting period. The issue has political as well as religious overtones, since it raises the question of whether the Orthodox Church should be oriented toward the Moscow patriarchate (as is the MOC) or the Bucharest patriarchate (as is the BOC). In June 2005 the Government rejected a BOC request for the return of property and archives, arguing that the law provides no mechanism for doing so.

On April 13, 2006, in a dispute over control of a local church, the BOC priest and some parishioners in the city of Floresti reportedly were assaulted by local police and members of the MOC when they tried to enter the church. In March 2005 the Supreme Court had ruled in favor of the Floresti BOC and ordered local authorities to recognize its registration; however, local officials continued to refuse the BOC access to the church. In March 2006 the BOC appealed to the ECHR.

In January 2006 the Government launched a public campaign for donations to renovate the historic Curchi monastery, which is administered by the MOC. By the end of the reporting period, approximately $750 thousand (lei 10 million) had been collected, in addition to in-kind donations. Parliament was selected as the "primary patron" of the monastery, and it passed a bill granting tax exemption to the renovation effort. Opposition parties criticized the bill, arguing that it contravened the constitution and was discriminatory toward other religious groups.

There was no change in the status of efforts to register the Church of the True Orthodox-Moldova, a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA), and it remained unregistered.

The Mormons continued to face bureaucratic obstacles to registration, including their fourth and most recent application in November 2005. The church filed a lawsuit against the SSR in December 2005, and on March 28, 2006, the Chisinau court of appeals ruled in favor of the Mormons and ordered the SSR to register the church. The SSR was presented with the court's ruling on May 10 and appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of Justice fifteen days later. The case is still pending examination by the Supreme Court, whose decision was expected to be final. In August 2004 two American citizens volunteering for a charitable organization registered by the Mormons were charged with, and convicted of, working illegally for an unregistered religious organization. In September 2004 the court of appeals overturned that decision and dropped all charges.

The SSR refused registration on numerous occasions to both 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 CIS states). The Spiritual Organization of Muslims filed its most recent application for registration on June 28, 2005, and was immediately refused. In February 2006 the court of appeals upheld the SSR decision. On June 28, 2006, the Supreme Court of Justice ordered the rehearing of the case by the court of appeals. At the end of the period covered by this report, the lawsuit filed by the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Moldova against the SSR for failing to register the Spiritual Organization of Muslims was under review by the court of appeals.

There has been no resolution in the case of the halted construction of a Baptist church in Capriana, despite Baptist appeals to both district and central authorities.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have reported several instances of interference in construction or renovation of houses of worship. In 2004 the Comrat mayor's office refused to issue a construction permit for a house of worship, and the village council of Saratenii Vechi voted to annul a previously issued urban-planning certificate and construction permit, in order to stop the renovation of a house of worship there. In April 2006, at the insistence of the local Orthodox community, authorities in the village of Farladeni terminated a contract with Jehovah's Witnesses for rental of a public building to use as a place of worship.

Authorities in Transnistria used registration requirements and other legal mechanisms to restrict the religious freedom of some religious groups. Evangelical religious groups meeting in private homes reportedly were told that they do not have the correct permits to use their residences as venues for religious services.

The Transnistrian authorities developed a textbook in 2000 that is used at all school levels, which reportedly contains negative and defamatory allegations regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses.

As noted in previous reports, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Transnistria filed suit against the Office for Religions and Cults (ORC) there for repeatedly refusing to accredit their religious leaders. In 2004 the Tiraspol City Court ruled to limit the activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses to the city of Tiraspol and to annul its 1997 registration. However, the court also rejected the Tiraspol city prosecutor's 2002 request to prohibit the group's activities altogether, and ruled that the ORC must reexamine the Jehovah's Witnesses' application for accreditation of their leaders.

In 2004 the Tiraspol city prosecutor notified the Jehovah's Witnesses that the group would need to reregister and obtain accreditation for its leaders in order to continue their activities; however, the ORC continued to refuse to issue accreditation. In early 2005 the Jehovah's Witnesses filed an appeal with the Supreme Court of Transnistria; however, it refused to examine the case, referring the Jehovah's Witnesses back to the Tiraspol city prosecutor. In June 2005 the ORC again refused to grant the Jehovah's Witnesses documentation required for registration, and in August 2005 the group sued the ORC. On June 21, 2006, the Tiraspol City Court was scheduled to consider the community's complaint regarding the inaction of the Transnistrian "presidential administration" and issue an opinion so that the group might be registered. However, the hearing was postponed due to the repeated failure of administration representatives to appear.

The Baptist community in Transnistria submitted an application for registration in 2004, which remained under review at the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Spiritual Organization of Muslims reported continued harassment by the police and new problems with the Ministry of Justice during the period covered by 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. In 2004 police detained several members following a raid and deported three Syrian citizens for not having proper legal residence documents. Authorities claimed the religious services were illegal because the organization and its meeting place were not properly registered. In March 2005 Calauza received a letter from the Ministry of Justice demanding that it stop the propagation of an unregistered cult. On May 19, 2006, police filmed attendees during Friday prayers and tried to bring charges of administrative violations, but the court dismissed the charges as unfounded.

In 2004 the Mormons reported that police showed up at one of their religious services, which are held at the offices of their humanitarian assistance organization. The police took video and pictures of the service and questioned several participants about their activities.

In January 2005 the Jehovah's Witnesses community in Domulgeni began proceedings to register as a legal entity. In November 2005 the community filed a complaint with the Balti court of appeals against the Floresti Raion district council chairman for his refusal to consider their application and won the case. The district council appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of Justice. On April 5, 2006, the Supreme Court reversed the decision of the Balti appeals tribunal and ordered that a new trial be held.

The Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists have reported numerous instances of being charged administrative fines. In several cases local police fined the group for failing to provide proper security for the group's meeting place, including barring the doors and windows and setting up a twenty-four-hour watch, despite the fact that no such requirements exist in law. In each case the charges were dropped on appeal to the courts.

The Jehovah's Witnesses in Transnistria have reported that officials levied administrative fines and made unjust arrests of its members. In all reported cases the charges were dropped on appeal to the Supreme Court. In 2004, at the Lipcani-Tighina border crossing, a border guard seized literature from two Jehovah's Witnesses, but the material was returned after they filed a complaint with the head of the border guard unit in Tiraspol.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relations among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The dispute between the Moldovan and the Bessarabian Orthodox churches continued during the reporting period. With the exception of the incident in Floresti, members of the two churches generally did not interfere with each others' freedom to worship.

Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses in various areas complained that local town councils impeded their ability to practice their religions freely. They reported physical and verbal abuse by townspeople, instigated by local Orthodox priests.

In the village of Rosietici, the Baptists have attempted to receive the proper documents and build a church for several years but have been repeatedly refused them by local authorities. In the village of Hijdieni, the Baptists were refused permission to renovate a building they had purchased, and villagers tried to vandalize the structure.

In 2004 Jehovah's Witnesses in the village of Saratenii Vechi began renovating a house for a place of worship. As they worked on the building, eighty local townspeople, along with the village priest and mayor, marched to the construction site, and threatened and insulted the workers. Later that week, some reportedly returned, forcibly entered the building, and verbally and physically abused the Jehovah's Witnesses present.

There were a few reports of negative press articles about non-Orthodox religious groups. The Jehovah's Witnesses have been the target of articles criticizing their beliefs and legitimacy, and Baptists in Transnistria claimed press reports about their religion had been negative.

On May 3, 2005, six tombstones were destroyed in the Jewish cemetery in Chisinau. Three young men, two from Chisinau and one from Tiraspol, were arrested in connection with the vandalism. The motives for the vandalism were not clear, and the Jewish community stated that it did not believe that the incident was an act of anti-Semitism. In November 2005 another twenty-five tombstones in the

same cemetery were destroyed. The police did not find the perpetrators, and the local Jewish community did not describe the incident as an act of anti-Semitism.

There was no progress in the investigation into several anti-Semitic acts that took place in Transnistria in 2004, when more than seventy tombstones were desecrated in the Jewish cemetery in Tiraspol and unknown persons attempted to set the Tiraspol synagogue on fire. Transnistrian authorities believed the same persons perpetrated the attacks.

In 2003 unknown persons destroyed eight tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Balti. However, according to a leading rabbi in Chisinau, it was not clear whether anti-Semitism motivated the incident.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers have met with leaders and legal representatives of many religious organizations to discuss registration, restitution, and other problems organizations have had with the authorities. The embassy raised concerns at the highest levels of the Government regarding the persistent registration difficulties of some religious groups. The embassy sent diplomatic notes to the Government expressing concern about continued delays in registering some groups as well as others being blocked from constructing houses of worship. During the period covered by this report, an embassy officer met with the head of the SSR to discuss the continued difficulties of some organizations in obtaining official registration. An embassy representative maintains regular contact with religious leaders throughout the country.

The U.S. ambassador met with leaders of the major religious organizations, including the MOC, BOC, Catholic Church, and the Jewish community. Embassy employees maintain contact with most of the resident American missionaries. The embassy has supported the activities of religious and secular groups, and has funded several NGO projects to promote tolerance and understanding in society.

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 practices, and public expression are provided for in Articles 2, 9, and 23 of the constitution.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government denies religious organizations regarded as "sects" permission to operate.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The principality has an area of 0.8 square miles and a population of approximately 32,100. Catholicism is the state religion, and most of the approximately 7,200 Monegasque citizens living in the principality adhered to that religion, at least nominally. There were five Catholic churches in the principality and a cathedral presided over by an archbishop. Protestantism was the next most practiced religion, with two churches. There was one synagogue in the principality. The constitution provides the nearly 25,000 noncitizen residents in the principality the same religious freedom as citizens. Most noncitizens also adhered to either Catholicism or Protestantism, although there were some residents who practiced Judaism, Islam, or other world religious groups. There were no mosques in the principality. 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. The Catholic ritual generally played an important role in state festivities, such as the annual national day celebration.

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. Organizations regarded as religious "sects" routinely have been denied such registration; however, there were no reports of religious organizations being denied registration during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There were no known ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religious groups. There were no reports of societal religious violence in the principality.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

THE NETHERLANDS

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to an overall environment of religious freedom and mutual tolerance. The killing of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 by a Dutch Islamic extremist and subsequent reactions, however, brought to the surface simmering tensions between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities, which continued to color relations between the two groups. In the public debate, Dutch Muslims often felt compelled to defend themselves against criticism for such perceived problems as the poor integration of Muslim immigrants into society, the high level of criminal activity among Muslim youth, and the conservative views of orthodox Muslims on women's rights and corporal punishment. The level of anti-Semitic incidents remained relatively high, and many incidents appeared to have been politically motivated in reaction to developments in the Middle East.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as 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 approximately 16.3 million. Approximately 60 percent of the population had some religious affiliation, although many did not actively practice their religion. Approximately 31 percent considered themselves Roman Catholic; 14 percent Dutch Reformed; 6 percent Muslim; 6 percent Calvinist Reformed; 3 percent other (Hindu, Jewish, or Buddhist); and 40 percent atheist or agnostic. Other Protestant denominations included Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Protestants from the United States, and Remonstrants. Approximately 20 percent of citizens, primarily among those who left the "traditional" churches, described themselves as "seekers of spiritual or philosophical truths." These persons tended to gravitate toward (although not necessarily join) newer or nontraditional religious movements, such as Pentecostal groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, Theosophy, or Anthroposophy.

Society had become increasingly secularized during the several decades prior to the reporting period. According to a 1995 study of the Government's Social Cultural

Planning Bureau, religious membership declined steadily from 76 percent in 1958 to 41 percent in 1995, and continued to decrease, although at a slower pace. Membership was decreasing among all religions except Islam. Approximately one-quarter of church members were active within their religious communities. In a 2002 study, an estimated 25 percent of Roman Catholics, 33 percent of Dutch Reformed, 55 percent of Calvinist Reformed, and 50 percent of Muslims attended church/mosque at least once every two weeks. Approximately 70 percent of the total population never attended services. There were no figures for Jewish participation rates.

Research revealed that those who left a religion rarely returned. Nonetheless, significant numbers of those who left their religions continued to consider themselves to be members of a religious group. The beliefs and practices of many of these adherents developed into what some described as a selective approach to religion, accepting what they consider the positive, but not the negative, aspects of a particular religion.

Following the secularization that began in the 1960s, many Roman Catholics left their church. Among those remaining, many expressed alienation from their religious hierarchy and doctrine. For example, most of the country's Catholics expressed no objections to female or married priests and differed with church thinking on a number of sensitive doctrinal issues.

The country's Protestantism was quite heterogeneous. Among the Protestant churches, the Dutch Reformed Church remained the largest, although it also suffered the greatest losses to secularization. Church membership declined by two-thirds in the fifty years prior to the reporting period. The second largest Protestant group, the Calvinist Reformed Church, was less affected by membership losses and even succeeded in attracting former members of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 2003, the main Dutch Protestant churches merged into the United Protestant Churches; however, a few orthodox communities refused to merge.

Because of a long-established climate of religious tolerance, Jews numbered more than 140,000 in 1940. Amsterdam harbored one of the largest and liveliest Jewish communities in Europe. During World War II, 106,000 Dutch Jews were killed, the highest percentage in Western Europe. Of the remainder, approximately 5,000 remained in the country, while the rest fled. In the post-war period, Jewish life slowly revived and flourished. While the Dutch have generally shied away from discussing this grim period of their history, Prime Minister Balkenende, in May 2005, acknowledged publicly Dutch "collaboration, indifference and treason" during the war, and "the lack of humanity and understanding" towards Jews in the post-war period.

Research from the Jewish Social Work organization showed that the country counted approximately 45,000 Jews during the reporting period, although the Stephen Roth Institute and the Council of Europe estimated the number to be closer to 30,000. Less than one-quarter of those belonged to active Jewish organizations such as religious communities, hospitals, schools, cultural and welfare centers, and sports and entertainment clubs. Since 1997, the Jewish community's main organizations had an umbrella group, the Central Jewish Consultation, which represented the community's interests in discussions with the Government.

The number of Muslims continued to rise because of relatively high birth rates and the continued practice of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants marrying partners from their countries of origin. By 2005, 950,000 Muslims, constituting 5.8 percent of the total population, were estimated to live in the country, primarily in the larger cities, including approximately 341,000 Turks and 295,000 Moroccans. Other Muslims came from the country's former colony of Suriname. In the past decade, Muslim numbers further increased because of the large numbers of asylum seekers from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia. A network of mosques and cultural centers served the Islamic community. This network was organized to conform to the national system of subsidies, which underwrites cultural activities geared to social orientation and the promotion of equal opportunities. The number of mosques increased to approximately 400: More than half catered to Turks, approximately 140 to Moroccans, and approximately 50 to Surinamese. The founding of more than forty-five Islamic schools further reflected the increased influence of Islam. Muslims were not separately organized in the political sphere. The Contact Body for Muslims and Government (CMO), representing approximately 80 percent of the Muslim community, discussed the community's interests with the Government. The official Muslim community unanimously condemned the Van Gogh killing.

There were approximately 95,000 Hindus, of whom 85 percent originally came from Suriname and approximately 10 percent from India. The country also hosted 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 was quite small, with approximately 17,000 members.

There was a small number of foreign missionary groups operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 funding for education to public as well as to religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and health care facilities, irrespective of their religious affiliation. To qualify for funding, institutions must meet strict nonreligious criteria for curriculum standards, minimum size, and health care.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, the law recognizes the existence of religious denominations and grants them certain rights and privileges, including tax exemptions. Although the law does not formally define what constitutes a "religious denomination" for these purposes, religious groups generally have not experienced any problems qualifying as religious denominations.

The law provides for religious minorities to have their views broadcast on radio and television. For example, broadcasting time was allotted to the Islamic Broadcasting Foundation, an alliance of all Muslim groups in the country.

The government of Turkey exercised influence within the country's Turkish Islamic community through its religious affairs directorate, the Diyanet, which was permitted to appoint imams for the 140 Turkish mosques in the country. There was no such arrangement with the Moroccan government. The Moroccan government maintained connections with the approximately 100 Moroccan mosques through a federation of Moroccan friendship societies but has no mechanism to exercise direct influence in the country.

The authorities expressed 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. For example, government authorities insisted on strict observance of mandatory school attendance up to the age of sixteen, despite appeals by foreign imams to keep girls under the age of sixteen at home.

To counter undesired foreign influence, the Government began to provide subsidies to universities providing training for local persons interested in becoming imams to ensure that they have a basic understanding of local social norms and values. Given the strict separation between the state and religion, however, the authorities themselves could not organize such training, and instead depended on private organizations. In addition, the assembled Muslim organizations decided, in February 2005, to found an Islamic institute to educate imams and Islamic theologians in coordination with individual university programs; the institute was not set up at the end of the period covered by this report. Parliament proposed phasing out the issuance of work permits to foreign imams by 2008 to increase the number and influence of locally educated religious leaders. As an interim measure, the Government decided that all imams and other spiritual leaders recruited in Islamic countries first must follow a yearlong integration course before they would be allowed 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 condemn 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 (CGB) and the courts also repeatedly addressed the wearing of headscarves in schools and places of employment. The prevailing opinion is that the wearing of headscarves may be banned only on narrow grounds, such as security considerations or inconsistency with an official government uniform. In 2003, the CGB stated that a recent ban by Amsterdam schools on wearing burqas in class is not discriminatory. The CGB stated that open teacher-

student and student-to-student interaction is more important than the right to wear a burqa. In late 2005, the Parliament adopted a resolution urging the Government to ban public wearing of burqas. The integration minister replied that a general ban was not possible under the law, but she was investigating whether such a ban was possible under specific circumstances, such as at school or in the workplace.

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. In 2004, the CGB ruled against a company that had denied employment to a Turkish applicant because he intended to attend Friday services at a mosque. This was considered a violation of freedom of religion. According to the CGB, Friday service for Muslims is equivalent to Sunday service for Christians. It ruled that employers are obliged to take account of reasonable religious demands from their employees, except in exceptional circumstances.

In 2003, legislation took effect that explicitly permits employees to refuse to work on Sunday for religious reasons, unless the work's nature, such as in the health sector, does not permit such an exception. The legislation came in the wake of charges by the Calvinist Reformed Social Union of religious discrimination by employers and reports of job applicants being turned down for employment for refusing to work on Sundays for religious reasons.

In November 2005, a Dutch lower court ordered the Government to make a formal Schengen Treaty exception to a German entry ban on the Reverend and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, founders of the Unification Church.

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 manifestly 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.

In its report covering the period between January 2004 and May 2005, the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) registered 326 anti-Semitic incidents in 2004, compared to 334 in 2003. Although these figures declined for the second year in a row, CIDI qualified the level of incidents as "continuously high" and identified as one major cause for anti-Semitic behavior the dissemination of anti-western and anti-Semitic propaganda from the Middle East, as well as sermons by imams that enhance anti-Semitic stereotypes.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious communities tended to live alongside each other in harmony. Among them, the Protestant denominations in particular promoted the Jewish cause and reached out to the Islamic community. However, a May 2005 poll by the private consultancy Motivaction showed 10 percent of the native Dutch population admitted to being racist, 27 percent said they disliked foreigners, and 43 percent said Islam was incompatible with Western society. The government minister for integration withheld comment and said she would wait for a more official government report, due later in the year.

In the fall of 2001, widespread societal resentment towards growing numbers of Muslims and their culture became apparent. Populist politician Pim Fortuyn, who was killed shortly before the 2002 general elections, received broad support for his characterization of Islam as "a backward culture" that is intolerant toward women and homosexuals and that allows practices from the Middle Ages.

The November 2004 killing of Dutch filmmaker and critic of Islam, Theo van Gogh by a Dutch Muslim extremist exacerbated existing social tensions. The killing triggered a brief upsurge of violent incidents, which had largely subsided by the end of the period covered by this report. However, minor incidents, including intimidations, brawls, vandalism, and graffiti with abusive texts, were frequent. Expanding pockets of both radicalized Muslim and other youth, who identified themselves as "native Dutch," were responsible for many of these instances of violence. A number

of offenders were arrested, prosecuted, and convicted. Polls revealed that popular attitudes towards Muslims were rapidly becoming more negative, and a majority viewed their presence as a threat. In a February 2006 poll by the R&M Matrix research agency, a majority of "native Dutch" found Islam to be intolerant (52 percent of participants), violent (40 percent), women-unfriendly (70 percent), and humorless (54 percent); 54 percent opined that Islam and democracy were incompatible. Muslims already faced continuing criticism for such perceived problems as the poor integration of Muslim immigrants into society, the high level of criminal activity among Muslim youth, and the conservative views of orthodox Muslims on topics such as women, homosexuals, and corporal punishment. Overcoming habitual reticence and abandoning Dutch libertarian attitudes toward religion, a number of outspoken politicians, mainly from the right, openly argued that Islam is incompatible with Dutch traditions and social values.

The Muslim community reacted with restraint to the cartoon controversy and refrained from any outburst of public violence. Government and Parliament seized upon the controversy to emphasize the "inviolable" rights of freedom of speech and freedom of religion. If someone feels offended, the only venue is to sue. The prime minister added that freedom of speech was "no obligation to offend."

Former parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali, known for her criticism of what she called Islam's intolerance of homosexuals and its subjugation of women, generated substantial controversy in the Muslim community. In May 2006, she announced that she would move to the United States.

In response to the controversy, the Government launched a comprehensive outreach campaign to counter anti-Muslim sentiments, stressing that the majority of Muslims fit comfortably into Dutch society. The Government also opened three imam training programs, with a fourth scheduled to open soon. At the same time, the Government made clear that it would combat directly groups espousing violence in support of an extremist Islamic agenda. These efforts raised public awareness and triggered debate, but concerns remained about the effectiveness of the new measures. Many in the Muslim community noted an increased sense of alienation from Dutch society.

The Government repeatedly condemned any form of anti-Semitism and formed a comprehensive action plan to combat any form of discrimination. According to this plan, parents have primary responsibility for preventing anti-Semitic incidents; schools can also help to combat discrimination and inculcate respect and tolerance. Public debate and dialogue are other tools to achieve these goals, to which end several nongovernmental organizations have launched projects, such as Een Ander Joods Geluid (An Alternative Jewish Viewpoint), to foster debate on equality, tolerance, and human dignity. Also, the Dutch Coalition for Peace has called on Jews, Palestinians, and other Muslims in the country to work together to restore peace in the Middle East.

Stricter instructions to prosecutors and the police took effect in 2003 to ensure proper attention is given to incidents of discrimination. Measures were also taken to deal more effectively with incitement to discrimination on the Internet. Despite these measures, critics claimed that law enforcement agencies still do not give priority to instances of discrimination. Prosecutions and convictions remained rare.

The Ministry of Education tasked schools in longstanding guidelines to teach about different religions and ideologies in conjunction with discrimination and intolerance, with explicit attention being paid to the persecution of Jews in World War II. The Ministry of Welfare subsidized a special program to teach children about World War II and the persecution of Jews. In particular, the program was designed to raise awareness about the consequences of prejudice. The Government also sought to promote dialogue and supported initiatives that aim to create a better understanding between Jews and Muslims. The Anne Frank Foundation published a book, called Fifty Questions on Anti-Semitism, primarily intended for teachers who interacted with Muslim students.

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. It also engages 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 faiths.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 150 thousand square miles and a population of approximately 4.6 million. Citizens were considered to be members of the state church unless they explicitly associated themselves with another denomination; 86 percent of the population (approximately 3.9 million persons) nominally belonged to the state church. However, actual church attendance was rather low.

Other religious groups operated freely and included various Protestant Christian denominations (152,975 members; 3.9 percent of the population), Muslims (77,857 members; 1.9 percent), and Roman Catholics (46,308 members; 1.2 percent). Buddhists, Jews, Orthodox, Sikhs, and Hindus were 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—had 69,610 registered adult members and claimed 10,000 children as associate members. Persons could not register as full members until they reach adulthood. The Government estimated that an additional 5.6 percent of the population (roughly 252,000 persons) did not formally practice religion.

The majority of European and American immigrants, who made up approximately half of the foreign-born population, were either Christian or nonreligious, with the notable exception of Muslim refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Most non-Western immigrants practiced Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, or Hinduism. Foreign missionaries and other religious workers operated freely in the country.

Forty-two percent of the country's religious minorities were concentrated in the Oslo metropolitan area, including 76 percent of the country's Muslims and the country's entire Buddhist community.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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. It is supported financially by the state, and there is a constitutional requirement that the king and at least one-half of the cabinet belong to this church.

On March 14, 2006, the U.N. Human Rights Committee voiced concerns that a section of the constitution is incompatible with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Specifically, the constitution provides that individuals professing the Evangelical-Lutheran religion must raise their children in the same faith.

Church officials and some politicians spoke in favor of a 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 is to ascertain whether the state-church system should be maintained, reformed, or discontinued. The commission has its own secretariat and has members from several parts of society, including different church groups and other religions, politicians, legal experts, and the Sami people.

On January 31, 2006, the commission presented its assessments. A large majority of members advocated that the existing state-church system be abolished. The Storting (parliament) is expected to make a final decision in 2008, based upon the commission's assessment.

A religious community is required to register with the Government only if it desires state support, which is provided to all registered denominations in accordance with their membership.

There are no special licensing or registration requirements for foreign religious workers. Foreign religious workers are subject to the same visa and work permit requirements as other foreign workers. 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 on June 3, 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 exclude, an employee based upon that employee's particular origin. The law also protects employees against indirect discrimination. For example, an employer cannot completely prohibit wearing hijabs as such exclusion will theoretically prohibit women from wearing hijabs for religious reasons.

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.

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 one through ten (ages six to sixteen). 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 faiths. 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' rights to provide religious instruction to their children. In 2002, the Humanist Association appealed the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg and the United Nations Human Rights Commission. In November 2004, the UNHRC decided that the practice of a mandatory religious class broke with human rights principles, violating Article 18 of the ICCPR. The UNHRC held that the law violated the parental ability to choose their children's religious and moral upbringing. The case was scheduled for debate at the ECHR in the fall of 2006.

In response, the Government gave parents the right to exempt their children from the CKREE until August 2005 (when a new curriculum was implemented). The UNHRC demanded that the Government grant parents either the ability to fully exempt their children from the class, or make the course religion/belief-neutral.

Under the new curriculum, Christianity, as the state religion, continued to receive a larger percentage of the class's teaching time than other religions. The final law states that children cannot receive complete class exemption. Limited exemptions may occur with respect to specific classroom activities, such as singing hymns and/or public prayer. This partial exemption right also applies to other courses, such as gym or cooking-classes.

The Humanist Association did not support the recent curriculum changes. The association noted 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. Accordingly, 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.

In the past, Muslims have encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where Muslims are concentrated. Since 1975, the town council in Drammen had regularly turned down applications to build a mosque. However, in 2004, the Muslim community in Drammen received permission to build a mosque. No other problems with permission to construct mosques have been recorded.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits prospective employers to ask job applicants who are applying for positions in private schools, religious schools, or day care centers, whether they agree to teach and behave in accordance with the institution's or religion's beliefs and principles.

In 2006, the city of Oslo recommended banning the wearing of burqas and nikabs in schools. Accordingly, the city sent its recommendation to the Ministry of Knowl-

edge in order to determine necessary changes to existing laws which would effectuate such a ban in the 2006–2007 school year.

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 organizations had reported that anti-Semitic incidents doubled from 2002 to 2003. The majority of the forty reported incidents in 2003 involved verbal harassment of primary and secondary school Jewish students by non-Jewish students. A small number of incidents involved threats against Jews. There were no reports of anti-Semitic violence or vandalism through June 2006.

The Government was vigilant in fighting anti-Semitism and promoting religious tolerance. In April 2004, Prime Minister Bondevik met with two Jewish children who had been harassed on the basis of their religion and, at the conclusion of the meeting, issued a strong public statement condemning anti-Semitism and calling on the public to fight anti-Semitism more actively.

Norway is a member of the International Task Force for 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 includes teaching high school students about the deportation and extermination of Norwegian Jews from 1942 to 1945.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. A Cooperation Council for Faith and Secular Society included the state church and other religious communities, including the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and secular humanist communities. The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs facilitated closer coordination and international cooperation on religious freedom issues, and supported projects in China, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and Indonesia that develop contacts, foster dialogues on interreligious understanding, and establish nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with representatives from different religions. The Ecumenical Council of Christian Communities was active in promoting cooperation within the Christian community. There was cooperation between the various religious communities on human rights issues in the past several years. Bilateral dialogue between the state church and the Muslim and Jewish communities generated statements in support of minority rights and human rights.

A Christian newspaper, Magazinet, published cartoons lampooning Muhammad. The cartoons, originally published by a Danish newspaper, triggered an international furor, including the burning of Norway's embassy in Syria and attacks upon Norwegian troops in Afghanistan. In February 2006, the editor of Magazinet, following receipt of twenty e-mail death threats, publicly apologized for offending the Muslim community. The Islamic Council welcomed the apology and offered the editor its protection. The apology (and the council's acceptance) received governmental praise, including from the minister of labor and social inclusion.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In 2004, the U.S. Embassy sponsored the participation of a U.S. constitutional law expert in an Oslo Coalition seminar on religious freedom. During the current reporting period, representatives from the embassy's political and economic affairs section participated in a seminar involving religious issues sponsored by the Oslo-based organization "Dialogue for Peace." In addition, public affairs staff attended a seminar on peace and democracy in Afghanistan which included extensive discussions on religious freedom. Finally, the embassy sponsored a Norwegian international visitor of Middle Eastern descent who attended a program in the United States on managing diversity in a multi-ethnic society. The program focused in large part on how to deal with different religious groups in society.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Jewish community leaders reported several serious anti-Jewish incidents in the country during the period covered by this report, including an attack on the chief rabbi of Poland and the stabbing of an antifascist activist by a neofascist skinhead group. There were occasional desecrations of Jewish and, more frequently, Roman Catholic cemeteries by skinheads and other marginal elements of society. 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 monitor threats to religious freedom and seek further resolution of unsettled legacies of the Holocaust and the communist era.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 120,725 square miles and a population of approximately 39 million. More than 96 percent of citizens were identified as Roman Catholic; however, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and much smaller Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim congregations were also present.

According to the 2005 Annual Statistical Yearbook of Poland, the following figures represent the formal membership of the listed religious groups, but not the actual number of persons in those religious communities; for example, the actual number of Jews was estimated at between 20,000 and 30,000, while the formal membership of the Union of Jewish Communities totaled only 2,500. The number of Jews was slowly rising, partly because of converts.

The yearbook estimated that there were 34,206,767 baptized Roman Catholics; 509,100 Orthodox Church members; 53,000 Greek Catholics; 127,377 Jehovah's Witnesses; 77,500 Lutherans (Augsburg Confession); 23,894 Old Catholic Mariavits; 19,172 members of the Polish Catholic Church; 20,890 Pentecostals; 9,488 Seventh-day Adventists; 4,688 Baptists; 5,076 members of the New Apostolic Church; 111 members of Muslim associations; 915 Hare Krishnas; 4,420 Methodists; 2,952 members of the Church of Christ; 3,550 Lutherans (Reformed); 2,274 Catholic Mariavits; 1,305 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); and 2,500 members of the Union of Jewish Communities. The vast majority of the Jewish community in Poland, which had numbered approximately 3 million people before the Nazi occupation of Poland during World War II, was killed in the Holocaust. The community was estimated at 20,000 to 30,000, including the 2,500 registered members listed in the country's Statistical Yearbook, during the period covered by this report.

Each of these religious groups has a relationship with the state governed by either legislation or treaty, with the exception of Jehovah's Witnesses, the New Apostolic Church, the Church of Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna), and the Church of Christ.

A March 2005 public opinion poll indicated that the attitude of Poles toward religion was little changed from the last polling, conducted in 2003. Approximately 58 percent of citizens actively participated in religious ceremonies at least once per week. Nine percent of respondents declared that they had no contact with the Roman Catholic Church, 16 percent that they attended Mass once to twice per month, and 17 percent that they attended Mass only sporadically. Approximately 3 percent declared themselves to be nonbelievers. The survey also found that women continued to be more religious than men, and, while 58 percent of citizens considered themselves active Catholics, 39 percent preferred to consider themselves "believers in their own way."

Foreign missionary groups operated 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. The Criminal Code stipulates that offending religious sentiment through public

speech is punishable by a fine or up to a three-year prison term. The Roman Catholic Church was the dominant religious group in the country.

There are fifteen 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 fifteen, enjoy equal protection under the law, and there were no reports of serious conflicts among churches or religious groups.

Religious communities may register with the Ministry of the Interior; however, they are not required to do so and may function freely without registration. According to the 1989 Law on Guaranteeing Freedom of Conscience and Belief, registration requires that the group submit the names of at least one hundred members as well as other information about the group. This information on membership must be confirmed by a notary public, although the registration itself often appears to be a formality. In 2005, no new religious groups registered. However, in the first half of 2006, two new religious groups registered with the Ministry: The Evangelical Christian Church and the Presbyterian Church. In April 2006, the Salvation Army's application to register as a religion was denied for technical reasons by the Ministry of Interior. The Salvation Army appealed this decision and was still awaiting a decision on this appeal when the period covered by this report ended. 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 government restrictions on establishing and maintaining places of worship.

The law places Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox, and Protestant communities on the same legal footing, and the Government attempts to address the problems that minority religious groups may face.

Foreign missionaries are subject only to the standard rules applicable to foreigners temporarily in the country. There were no reports that missionaries were denied entry into the country.

Although the constitution gives parents the right to bring up their children in compliance with their own religious and philosophical beliefs, religious education classes continue to be taught in the public schools at public expense. Children have a choice between religious instruction and ethics. Although Catholic Church representatives teach the vast majority of religious classes in the schools, parents may request such classes in any of the religions legally registered, including Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish religious instruction. While it is not common, such non-Catholic religious instruction exists, 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 Government enjoys good relations with many domestic and international Jewish groups. 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, including 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 five-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 laws 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 local Jewish community, whose opportunity for filing claims under the 1997 law expired in 2002, totaled 5,544. The commission considered 857 cases, of which 277 were settled amicably and 317 properties were restored.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and some 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. The Government elected in 2005 vowed to expedite the process, particularly with respect to noncontroversial cases.

Of approximately 10,000 communal property claims filed for restitution of religious property, more than 4,100 were resolved, with more than 1,200 properties returned by the end of 2005.

At the end of the reporting period, approximately 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); 922 properties returned through decision of the commission on property restitution, which rules on disputed claims; and 617 claims rejected by the commission.

The Lutheran Church, for which the filing deadline was 1996, filed claims for 1,200 properties. Of these, 834 cases were heard, 228 of which were resolved amicably and 136 properties were restored.

A total of 313 claims were filed with the commission by the Orthodox Church, of which 137 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 no 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 theμpresident 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. In early 2006, the Government expressed its intention to draft and submit new legislation regarding the restitution of private property. 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 faiths seeking restitution or compensation for property confiscated during and after World War II.

The Government cooperates with the country's NGOs and officials of major denominations to promote religious tolerance and lends support to activities such as the March of the Living, an event to honor victims of the Holocaust. In January 2005, the country hosted a number of world leaders, including the U.S. Vice President and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, at ceremonies commemorating the sixtieth Anniversary of the Liberation of the Auschwitz and Birkenau concentration camps.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In 2001, the Government established a department within the Ministry of Interior to monitor the activities of "new religious groups" and "cults." In April 2002, the Government closed the department; however, an employee of the Interior Ministry's Public Order Department continued to monitor religious groups.

Although the constitution provides for the separation of religion and state, crucifixes hang in both the upper and lower houses of Parliament, as well as in many other public buildings.

Public radio and television stations broadcast Catholic Mass, but only with licensure from the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Council.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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-Semitic feelings 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.

On May 27, 2006, during the visit of Pope Benedict XVI, Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Shudrich was attacked by an anti-Semitic youth who knocked him down, sprayed him with pepper spray, and shouted "Poland is for Poles," an anti-Semitic slogan from the interwar period. After the attack, President Lech Kaczynski and Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz met with Shudrich and publicly denounced the attack and anti-Semitism.

Following this incident and one on May 16 in which an antifascist activist was stabbed by skinheads in Warsaw after being targeted by a neo-Nazi website, police created a special unit that combats neofascist activities, according to the prime minister's advisor on Jewish affairs. Police in July arrested the alleged content provider of Red Watch, the website that listed the name and whereabouts of the man who was stabbed by skinheads in Warsaw and which also promoted hatred of Jews and homosexuals.

There were more than 500 racist and xenophobic websites in the country, according to Never Again, an antiracism organization. Occasional cases of cemetery desecration, including both Jewish and, more frequently, Catholic sites, also occurred during the period covered by this report.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

Orthodox religious officials reported accounts of discrimination towards the Orthodox community. There were reports of less than proportional funding for cultural events associated with the Orthodox community, layoffs in which Orthodox employees were the first dismissed, and opinions circulated in the local press in some areas depicting Roman Catholicism as necessary for true citizenship.

In February 2006, Prime Minister Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and Foreign Minister Stefan Meller publicly apologized to Muslims for the publication of potentially offensive cartoons depicting Muhammad in national daily Rzeczpospolita.

In March 2006, the NGO Media Ethics Council publicly condemned anti-Semitic statements made by commentator Stanislaw Michalkiewicz on the popular Catholic radio station Radio Maryja. In addition to Michalkiewicz's comments, Radio Maryja often aired anti-Semitic comments on call-in shows. The station, run by the controversial Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, had close relations with the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) and had never been fined by the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) for its anti-Semitic content despite public protest. However, in June, Elzbieta Kruk, the president of KRRiT, asked for a formal explanation of Michalkewicz's comments. A KRRiT spokesman claimed that KRRiT could not begin discussing consequences for Radio Maryja's broadcasting without an explanation from the station first.

Opinion polls suggested that these anti-Semitic sentiments were not shared by a majority of citizens; an April 2006 poll published in the major daily Gazeta Wyborcza indicated that 89 percent of citizens interviewed believed Radio Maryja should not be involved in politics.

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's Youth League, a group which has long been perceived as anti-Semitic.

The fifteenth March of the Living took place on April 25, 2006. An estimated 10,000 participants walked from the former Auschwitz concentration camp to the former Birkenau death camp to honor victims of the Holocaust. Schoolchildren, Boy Scouts, the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society, Polish survivors of Auschwitz, and the

Polish Union of Jewish Students participated in the march. Former Israeli Prime Minister Simon Peres led the march, which was also attended by many prominent world leaders. In May 2006, Pope Benedict XVI visited Auschwitz and reiterated his condemnation of the Holocaust and his commitment to interreligious harmony and freedom.

There was some public concern expressed 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 and depicting 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.

In May 2006, the second annual Meeting with Arab Culture was held in Krakow. In June 2006, the city of Bydgoszcz and a local university hosted an Arabic Culture Day, with sessions focusing on tolerance and multiculturalism. Also in June, the Sixth Annual Muslim Cultural Days conference was held in Gdansk. The Warsaw Islamic Council and Warsaw University's Oriental Studies Department also planned and held numerous activities throughout the year to promote understanding of Muslim faith and culture.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

Embassy and consulate representatives, including the ambassador, regularly met with representatives of major religious communities, including leaders of the Jewish community, both in the capital and during travels throughout the country. Consulate officials routinely attended commemorations and ceremonial events 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, which is 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 the consulate continued to provide support for activities designed to promote cultural and religious tolerance. Those activities included press and public affairs support for the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation's education project in Oswiecim, as well as continued support for the annual NGO-sponsored "Days of Tolerance" in Kolobrzeg, an event that brought together youths of various religious and ethnic backgrounds from many countries. The majority of events conducted in Krakow's "Partnership for Democracy" (formerly called "Bridges to the East") featured nonviolence and tolerance as integral parts of the presentations.

As part of the embassy's overall program promoting religious tolerance, Villanova Professor Hibba Abugideiri visited the country March 21–24, 2006, in order to discuss Islam in America and the role of American Muslim Women in U.S. society. Abugideiri's activities included speaking engagements at the Oriental Studies Department of Warsaw University, a lecture for an MBA class at the Warsaw Economics and Trade School (SGH), a speaking engagement co-organized with Warsaw's leading women's activist group "Feminoteka," a speech to international high school students at the American School in Warsaw, and a presentation at the U.S. Embassy as part of the embassy's "America Presents" program.

In May 2006, at the request of the Government, the embassy collaborated with police to identify individuals associated with the Blood and Honor website, leading to several arrests.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; there are a number of government and privately sponsored activities that contribute to interfaith understanding.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 35,672 square miles, and a population (as of January 2006) of approximately 10.4 million. More than 80 percent of the population above the age of twelve identified with the Roman Catholic Church; however, a large percentage stated that they did not actively participate in church activities. Approximately 4 percent identified with various Protestant denominations (including approximately 250 thousand evangelicals), and approximately 1 percent with non-Christian religious groups. Less than 3 percent stated that they had no religion.

Practitioners of non-Christian religions included approximately 35,000 Muslims (largely from sub-Saharan Lusophone Africa and South Asia), approximately 700 Jews, and a very small population of Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. There was also a Hindu community of approximately 7,000 persons, which largely traced its origins to South Asians who emigrated from Lusophone Africa and from the former colony of Goa in India. Many of these minority communities were not formally organized.

Government estimates suggested that there were more than 200,000 immigrants from Eastern Europe in the country. More than half of these immigrants were from the Ukraine; many were Eastern Orthodox. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reported 35,000 members. Brazilian syncretistic Catholic churches, which combined Catholic ritual with pre-Christian Afro-Brazilian ritual, such as Candomble and Umbanda, also operated in small numbers, as did 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 practiced in the country. The Church of Scientology had approximately 200 active members, primarily in the Lisbon area.

Foreign missionary groups, such as the Mormons, 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. 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 thirty years or those recognized internationally for at least sixty 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 December 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 create the registry of religious entities.

The Catholic Church maintains a separate agreement with the Government under the terms of the 1940 Concordat. In May 2004, the Government signed an amended concordat with the Vatican to comply with the 2001 Religious Freedom Act. The new concordat was approved by Parliament and the president and ratified in 2004. This document abrogates the previous concordat, which had been in force for sixty-four years but was considered obsolete due to the changes in national life. The new 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 curricula included an optional course called "Religion and Morals." This course functioned as a survey of world religious groups and was taught by laypersons. It could be used to give instruction on the Catholic religion, although the Catholic Church had to approve all teachers for this course. Other religious groups could set up such a course if they had ten or more children of that religion in the particular school. For example, the Evangelical Alliance held 263 classes in schools during the 2005–2006 school year. Under the 2001 Religious Freedom Act, each religion may approve the course's respective instructors.

In 2004, the Government established a Working Group for Inter-Religious Dialogue, a task force to promote multicultural and multireligious dialogue between the Government and society. Among its objectives are fostering tolerance for religious diversity, promotion of interreligious studies, and participation in national and international religious events. The working group is led by a government-appointed chairman and consists primarily of teachers who, by the nature of their jobs, have professional experience in this area.

Under the concordat, major Catholic holy days also are official holidays. Seven of the country's sixteen national holidays are Catholic holy days.

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, five 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 thirty years in the country or at least sixty years in their country of origin.

The Catholic Church receives 22.5 minutes of programming time per episode, while the remaining 7.5 minutes is divided among the other 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 "70×7," 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 completion of the city's mosque, completed at the end of this reporting period. In 2004, the municipality provided matching funds for the restoration of Lisbon's nineteenth-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, chief chaplaincies for the military, prisons, and hospitals remain state-funded positions for Catholics only.

The Papal Nuncio is always the dean of the diplomatic corps. The Church of Scientology, although recognized as a religious association since 1986, does not benefit from the 2001 Religious Freedom Act, since it has not been established in the country for thirty years or recognized internationally for sixty years, as required under the law. Scientology leaders were concerned that exclusion from the benefits accorded under the act may have a negative effect on their ability to practice their faith; however, they reported no discrimination or opposition during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to 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.

Following the interfaith congress held in 2003 at the Catholic shrine of Fatima, representatives of the world's leading religious groups explored the possibility of opening the shrine to a variety of religious groups. The first steps in developing Fatima as a multifaith center were taken in May 2004 when a Hindu religious service was held at the shrine in the Chapel of the Apparitions. There were subsequently a number of events involving Muslims and Buddhists at the Fatima Sanctuary. As a result, a few conservative Catholic organizations criticized the Church and called for a more traditionalist role for the Catholic shrine. However, several bishops, including the chairman of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference, publicly dismissed the criticism and restated their desire to welcome other religious groups to the shrine.

The residents of the Azores and Madeira archipelagos, although traditionally Catholic, were also quite tolerant of other religious groups. Both Mormon and Baptist missionaries were active on the islands. They were well treated and participated in Azorean and Madeiran social life.

A number of initiatives during the period covered by this report focused on the promotion of religious tolerance. In November 2005, the Parliamentary Committee for Religious Freedom organized a two-day international seminar on Religion in a Democratic State, which took place in Lisbon's Ismaili Center. The seminar focused on religious freedom and the role of religion in democratic societies. On March 4, 2006, President Sampaio, the mayors of Lisbon and Sintra, the labor minister, and other high-ranking authorities attended the opening of the Aga Khan Foundation's community center in Lisbon. This community development project is sponsored by the Ismaili foundation in partnership with, among others, the Catholic Church's Holy House of Mercy charity organization. On April 19, 2006, in a ceremony in a public square in downtown Lisbon, Jews and non-Jews marked the 500th anniversary of the killing of thousands of Jews who had been forced by the state to convert to Christianity. City officials unveiled a small memorial at the site of one of the main stakes used during the three-day killing spree in 1496. These initiatives received significant media coverage.

The Aristides de Sousa Mendes Foundation is a nongovernmental organization established to honor the Portuguese consul general in Bordeaux, France, who defied his dictatorial government and issued visas enabling approximately 30,000 Jews to escape through the country during World War II. In 2004, the Foundation collaborated on many events in the country and in cities around the world to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Aristides de Sousa Mendes's death.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives have continuing contacts with leaders of the country's religious communities, including the Catholic Church and the Jewish and Muslim communities. The U.S. Embassy hosted several events to promote religious freedom and tolerance. On October 17, 2005, the charge d'affaires hosted an Iftar for Muslim ambassadors and leaders in the Portuguese Islamic community to show support for tolerance and religious freedom. Ambassadors from Iraq, Turkey, Morocco, and Egypt were in attendance, along with the general delegate from Palestine and the sheik from the country's only Islamic school. On June 2, 2006, Phra Raja Sumedhacariya, the First Occidental (Buddhist) Father, spoke to a group of academics, religious leaders, and other Portuguese and international guests. The Father's talk, together with the deputy chief of mission's remarks, showed support for a multicultural and religiously tolerant society.

ROMANIA

The constitution provides 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 religions, and registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religions. The Government proposed a new law on religious freedom that remained under debate in Parliament. Many domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and religious groups criticized the draft law, expressing concern that the draft law, if passed, would institutionalize discrimination against many religious minorities and create impediments for many such groups to obtain official recognition as a religion. The Government still had not passed legislation to return to the Greek Catholic community the churches and church property transferred by the communists to the Orthodox Church in 1948, nor had it shown any inclination to do so by the end of the period covered by this report. The Government continued progress in recognizing the true history of the Holocaust in Romania, establishing and opening a new Elie Wiesel Institute for Romanian Holocaust Studies. This move was based on a recommendation made in a report released in 2004 by the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, commonly called the Wiesel Commission. The Government also took additional steps towards introducing the issue of the country's role in the Holocaust into school curricula and launched the first textbook about the Holocaust in the country in October 2005. Some minority religions continued to complain of lengthy delays in the process of granting construction permits, which they claimed were based on their status as minority religions. Although restitution of religious property continued to be slow, several important buildings were restituted to religious denominations after the passage of property legislation in July 2005. In February 2006, the Government approved new regulations related to religious assistance in penitentiaries, which allow the free access of all religious groups to prisons.

Relations among different religious groups were generally amicable; however, there were incidents in which the Romanian Orthodox Church showed some hostility toward non-Orthodox churches and criticized the proselytizing of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups. The Orthodox Church in general continued to prevent the return of Greek Catholic churches that it received from the state after the dismantling of the Greek Catholic Church by the communists in 1948.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, including at the highest political levels, as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the year, the U.S. Embassy continuously expressed concern about discriminatory components of the draft law on religion, including with the prime minister, members of Parliament, and the minister of culture and religious affairs. The embassy also continued to raise concern with officials about the failure of the Government to ensure the full restitution of religious properties, including Greek Catholic churches. The embassy sponsored numerous events on religious freedom, including visiting speakers from the United States and a program of active outreach to a wide range of religious groups. The embassy also supported extensively 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. The embassy continued to encourage government and religious leaders to respect religious freedom fully.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 91,699 square miles and a population of approximately 21.7 million.

The Romanian Orthodox Church was the predominant religion in the country. The Government officially recognizes eighteen religions: The Romanian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara (originally listed as part of the Orthodox Church), the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Old Rite Christian (Orthodox) Church, the Reformed (Protestant) Church, the Christian Evangelical Church, the Romanian Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Augustinian Church, the Lutheran Evangelical Church-Synod Presbyterian, the Unitarian

Church, the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Armenian Church, Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah's Witnesses (first recognized as a religion in 2003). Members of other faiths worshiped freely but were not afforded various forms of state support.

According to the 2002 census, the Romanian Orthodox Church (including the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara) had 18,817,975 members, which comprised 86.8 percent of the population. The Roman Catholic Church had 1,026,429 members. The Greek Catholic Church had 191,556 members, although this figure was disputed by the Greek Catholic Church, which claimed that there were many irregularities, such as census takers refusing to note Greek Catholic affiliation and automatically assuming Orthodox affiliation, which led to an inaccurate result. The Greek Catholic Church estimated in 2003 that its adherents numbered more than 790,000. (Greek Catholics were former members of the Romanian Orthodox Church who, in 1697, accepted principles required for union of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church, but continue to maintain many Orthodox observances and traditions.)

The Old Rite Christian (Orthodox) Church had 38,147 members. The Protestant Reformed Church had 701,077 members. The Christian Evangelical Church had 44,476 members. The Romanian Evangelical Church had 18,178 members. The Evangelical Augustinian Church had 8,716 members. The Lutheran Evangelical Church Synod-Presbyterian had 27,112 members. The Unitarian Church of Romania had 66,944 members. The Baptist Church had 126,639 members. The Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church) had 324,462 members. The Seventh-day Christian Adventist Church had 93,670 members. The Armenian Church had 687 members. There were 6,075 Jews, according to the 2002 census. The Jewish Community Federation, however, stated that it had approximately 10,200 members. Romanian Muslims, mostly Turks and Tartars, had 67,257 members. In addition, nongovernmental groups estimated that an additional 30,000 Muslims resided in Romania as noncitizen residents. Jehovah's Witnesses, which did not have legal status as a recognized religion at the time of the census, were estimated to have approximately 80,000 members and associates. According to the same census, the number of atheists was 8,524, and there were 12,825 persons who did not have any religious affiliation.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations ("the Secretariat"), most religions had followers dispersed throughout the country, although a few religious communities were concentrated in particular regions. Old Rite members (Lippovans) were located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Most Muslims were located in the southeastern part of the country in Dobrogea, near Bulgaria and the Black Sea coast. Most Greek Catholics were in Transylvania, but there were also Greek Catholics in Bucharest and the Banat and Crisana regions. Protestant and Catholic believers tended to be in Transylvania, but many also were located around Bacau. Orthodox or Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians were mostly in the northwestern part of the country. Orthodox ethnic Serbs were in Banat. Armenians were concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Members of the Protestant Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Unitarian churches in Transylvania were virtually all ethnic Hungarians.

According to published sources, the Baha'i Faith, the Family (God's Children), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Unification Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, and Zen Buddhism had active branches in the country; however, they were not officially recognized religions.

According to a nationwide poll conducted by the National Polling and Marketing Institute (INSOMAR) in April 2006, 6 percent of respondents stated that they went to church several times a week; 22 percent once a week; 23 percent several times per month; 34 percent only at Christmas and Easter; 12 percent once a year or less; and 3 percent not at all. A separate poll conducted in April 2006 by the Group for Social Surveys indicated that 85 percent of the respondents stated that the church was the institution they trusted most.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

Although the constitution provides for freedom of religion, the Government exercises considerable influence over religious life through laws and decrees. The Orthodox Church exercises substantial influence in its dominant role among a majority of the population and policymakers. Government registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religions. Several minority religious groups continued to claim credibly that low-level government officials and the

Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts at proselytizing and interfered with other religious activities.

The communist-era decree 177/1948 remained the basic law governing religious denominations and allows considerable state control over religious life. Technically, very few of the articles of this law have been abrogated formally; however, according to the Secretariat, a large number of its articles have been nullified in practice by the constitution and a series of governmental decrees. Although several religious denominations and religious associations confirmed that articles stipulating the state's interference with or control over religious life and activities have not been enforced, such provisions still exist in the law.

The Government requires religious groups to register. There is no clear procedure for the registration of religious groups as religions. The Government has refused to recognize a number of religious groups since 1990.

The total number of recognized religions remained low. Under the provisions of the 1948 decree, the Government recognized fourteen religions; subsequently, it added the Greek Catholic Church (1989) and the Jehovah's Witnesses (2003). The Romanian Evangelical Church and the Christian Evangelical Church, originally recognized as one religion, were separated into two religions, while the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara was also separately recognized from the Orthodox Church. The total number of recognized religions was eighteen. Recognized religions are eligible for state support; they have the right to establish schools, teach religion in public schools, receive government funds to build churches, pay clergy salaries with state funds and subsidize clergy's housing expenses, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, apply for broadcasting licenses for denominational frequencies, and enjoy tax-exempt status.

The Government registers religious groups that it does not recognize either as religious and charitable foundations or as cultural associations, a status which does not guarantee the same rights as a recognized religion.

Religious groups are registered under a government decree of 2000 on associations and foundations which became Law 246 in July 2005, and which abrogated Law 21 of 1924 and eliminated most of the bureaucratic obstacles in the registration process, including the minimum requirement of members needed to establish religious associations and foundations, and the requirement of the mandatory approval by the Secretariat. A 2003 ordinance reintroducing mandatory approval by the Secretariat for the registration of religious associations was abrogated in July 2005. Thereafter, religious groups no longer needed approval by the Secretariat in order to register as a religious association or foundation.

The number of adherents of each recognized religion in the 2002 census determines its state-provided budget. The Orthodox religion receives the largest share of governmental financial support. In addition, Orthodox religious leaders generally preside over state occasions. In 2005, the Government allocated financial assistance for construction and repair works amounting to almost $9.2 million (ROL 271,139 million) to the Orthodox Church. The Government allocated approximately $432,500 (ROL 12,793 million) to the Roman Catholic Church, around $273,000 (ROL 8,075 million) to the Greek Catholic Church, and approximately $365,500 (ROL 10,815 million) to the Reformed Church. In the first three months of 2006, the Government allocated approximately $3.5 million (ROL 104,340 million) to the Orthodox Church, $73,000 (ROL 2,160 million) to the Roman Catholic Church, close to $10,000 (ROL 300 million) to the Greek Catholic Church, and approximately $150,000 (ROL 4,410 million) to the Reformed Church.

The law governing the rights of foreigners, revised in 2003, introduced a long-stay visa for religious activities. Visa requirements include approval by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, evidence that the applicants represent a religious organization legally established in the country, certification of medical insurance, and a criminal record review. The law no longer limits visa extensions to six months, a change considered positive by most religious groups. Although the law provides for up to five years of visa extensions, the Jehovah's Witnesses continued to complain that their missionaries were granted only two-year and even one-year extensions without any explanation. The Baptist Church also reported that its missionaries who did not have U.S. or EU citizenship received only visas of a maximum one-year duration. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also complained of inconsistent requirements and high fees to obtain or renew visas. There are penalties for any foreigner who stays without a visa, but such penalties do not appear to be linked to religious activities. The Secretariat reported that it recommended the approval of 924 visas and visa extensions for religious workers in 2005, and 230 in the first 4 months of 2006.

In February 2005, the Government abolished the requirement of a construction permit from a special national commission in order to build places of worship; in-

stead, only local permits are required as with any construction. Minority religions, however, continued to report unjustified opposition by local authorities to granting such permits for some minority religious groups.

The Government did not adopt a new religion law to replace communist era legislation. The Parliament continued to debate a government-sponsored draft law on religious freedom since its September 2005 introduction. Although seemingly an improvement over previous proposals, civil society and international organizations, such as the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, criticized its limitations. The Government did not consult with nonrecognized religions regarding the draft law. Of the eighteen 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 U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) also expressed strong concern. The draft law requires an inordinately high numerical threshold of 0.1 percent of the population—or approximately 22,000 people—to qualify for religion status, a membership number that even some recognized religions do not have. In addition, minority religions must undergo a twelve-year waiting period in order to qualify for the more preferential religion status. Civil society organizations recommended the elimination of both requirements. In December 2005, the Upper House delayed debating the draft and, in the end, passed the draft law implicitly without any debates or amendments. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Romanian Chamber of Deputies was awaiting recommendations by its human rights and legal committees before holding a debate on the draft law. According to the press, the Chamber of Deputies' human rights and legal committee voted in support of an amendment proposed by one of its members that would penalize "aggressive proselytizing" by religious groups or individuals with fines or six months to three years in prison.

Minority religious groups continued to assert that central government and parliamentary officials were more cooperative than local officials.

During the reporting period, the Secretariat, in partnership with the independent NGO Conscience and Liberty, sponsored symposia on religious freedom issues. Subjects included the relations between the church and the state, as well as churches' social assistance, at symposia in Bucharest (in September 2005) and Iasi (in October 2005). The Secretariat also met with representatives of religious groups on a regular basis and attended the meetings of leading bodies of some religious denominations. On April 30, 2006, the Secretariat was present during the Greek Catholic Church's celebration of the Holy See's elevation of its status to major archbishopric. According to the Secretariat, the Government continued its efforts to mediate and defuse tensions between the Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches in some local areas.

The National Anti-Discrimination Council (CNCD), an institution established to curb discrimination of any kind (including on religious grounds), received fourteen complaints of discrimination on religious grounds in 2005 and six in the first six months of 2006.

Christmas and the Orthodox Easter are national holidays. Members of the other recognized religions that celebrate Easter on a different date are entitled by law to have an additional holiday. Religious leaders occasionally play political roles. In particular, many Orthodox leaders make public appearances with prominent political figures, and religious messages often contain political promises or goals, and support for particular political positions.

Most mainstream politicians continued to criticize anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia publicly, and criticized attempts to deny the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country. On October 10, 2005, President Traian Basescu highlighted the country's need to recognize its true Holocaust history and to "acknowledge its own mistakes" in his speech on National Holocaust Remembrance Day. During a January 23, 2006, conference to commemorate the 1941 Bucharest pogrom, President Basescu highlighted the necessity "to present the realities of that time to the young generation." In April 2006, Parliament passed and the president signed into law a decree issued in 2002 to combat anti-Semitism and ban fascist, racist, and xenophobic organizations. The president had previously returned the law unsigned to Parliament in October 2005 to ensure the addition of language to include the persecution of Roma in addition to Jews in the law's definition of the Holocaust.

Most of the streets named after the country's pro-Nazi World War II leader Marshal Ion Antonescu were renamed. Cluj-Napoca renamed its street in 2004. Targu Mures renamed its street in October 2005, after human rights NGO Pro Europa League applied constant pressure on the city's mayor. A street named for Antonescu continued to exist in Cimpulung Muscel.

In 2003, the Government established the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, headed by Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel and consisting of

thirty Romanian and foreign historians. The objective of the commission was to examine the history of the Holocaust in Romania; to identify the facts that took place during the Holocaust; and to disseminate the research results in the country and abroad. The organization of the commission—commonly called the Wiesel Commission—followed public statements made earlier in 2003 by then President Ion Iliescu, who minimized the Holocaust in Romania, and by former Information Minister Vasile Dincu, who denied the Holocaust in Romania. Iliescu subsequently asserted his comments had been misinterpreted, and the Government set up and fully supported the commission. In 2004, the Wiesel Commission presented its report. Iliescu praised the balance and objectivity of the report, publicly accepted its conclusions, and underscored the need for the country to come to terms with its past. The Wiesel Commission's recommendations included the Government's reversal of the previous rehabilitation of Nazi war criminals; establishment of a national Holocaust Remembrance Day; construction of a national Holocaust memorial and museum in Bucharest; and enforcement of legislation making Holocaust denial a crime. In addition, the commission recommended the comprehensive inclusion of the accurate history of the Holocaust in school curricula and textbooks.

In August 2005, the Government announced plans to build a Holocaust memorial in Bucharest and, in January 2006, launched a design contest for the memorial. In August 2005, the Government also established the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, which opened officially on October 10, 2005.

The Government made some progress in its efforts to expand public school education on the true history of the Holocaust in the country. The Government continued a program on Holocaust education introduced in 2002 at the National Defense College. In addition, the Holocaust was taught during history classes in sections on World War II in the seventh and eleventh grades. The situation of the Romanian Jews between 1940 and 1944 was taught as part of the State, Society, and Culture course in the twelfth grade. In October 2005, the Government launched the first standardized textbook on the Holocaust and the history of the Jews in the country, which was used for an elective course offered to the eleventh grade throughout the country during the 2005–2006 school year; 330 groups of high school students elected to take the course during the year, and the Ministry of Education distributed 255 copies of the textbook to the schools. A second edition of the textbook remained under publication. The Government did not implement any plans, however, to make the course mandatory for all public high schools. The elective course was first offered in the 2004–2005 school year at 200 high schools, but without a standardized textbook at the time.

The Holocaust in Romania was explicitly mentioned for the first time in general school curricula for the tenth grade in 2004, and the curricula were implemented in the 2005–2006 school year. According to the Ministry of Education, the description of the Holocaust was taught in line with the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. The Government also set up a teachers' association in Bacau and centers at universities in Cluj, Bucharest, Iasi, and Craiova to train approximately one hundred history teachers per year to teach the Holocaust. The Ministry of Education approved in 2005 a new Holocaust-teaching course (110 hours in duration) proposed by the director of the Bacau teachers' association. All centers began teaching the course in the 2005–2006 school year. In addition, the teachers received training in programs offered jointly by the Ministry of Education, Yad Vashem Institute, Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (Paris), and the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

In March 2006, the Ministry of Education made available on its website a teaching guide to assist the 327 teachers nationwide who instruct courses on the Holocaust. The guide was translated from a document drafted by the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, of which the country has been a member since 2004. The Ministry of Education also stated its intention to distribute 15,000 copies of this guide to school teachers. Throughout the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Education distributed 26,200 books in schools to be used as supplementary material in the teaching of the Holocaust; it also distributed 750 copies of the Wiesel Commission report and 900 CD/DVDs of a movie about the Holocaust in Romania. There were reports, however, that the number of books supplied was insufficient. The Ministry of Education continued to sponsor international seminars on the Holocaust and the teaching of its history. Two seminars were held in Bucharest in May 2006 for the training of teachers by a Yad Vashem speaker. The Government also earmarked funds amounting to $83 thousand (ROL 2.45 billion) to sponsor a June 2006 conference in Iasi organized by the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust to commemorate the 1941 Iasi pogrom.

In 2004, the Foreign Intelligence Service signed an agreement with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to grant access to its archives for research regarding the Holocaust.

In 2004, in line with the recommendation later contained in the Wiesel Commission's report, the Government established an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day to take place on or around October 9, the anniversary of the first deportation of Jews from southern Bukovina to Transnistria. In 2004, the Government commemorated this date for the first time. On October 9, 2005, the country commemorated for two days its second Holocaust remembrance day with events in several cities, including one held by President Basescu at Cotroceni Palace. The events, many organized by local schools, were attended by officials and key dignitaries, including the president, prime minister, and foreign minister.

In 2004, then-President Iliescu awarded the nation's highest honor, the "Order of the Star of Romania," to extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM) leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor, known for making numerous xenophobic and anti-Semitic comments. Iliescu also decorated a well-known Holocaust denier, PRM Vice Chairman Gheorghe Buzatu, with the prestigious "Faithful Service" award. The granting of awards to these two individuals generated a wave of protest: Elie Wiesel announced his decision to return the Order he received from Iliescu in 2002, stating that he "cannot belong to any group of which Vadim Tudor is a member." Separately, a group of fifteen Radio Free Europe journalists decided to return the awards they also received from Iliescu. In March 2005, President Traian Basescu created new honorary boards for the country's decorations, which have the authority to review all awards previously granted. To date, the awards decorated to the PRM leaders have not been rescinded.

In April 2006, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, in its Annual Status Report on Worldwide Investigation and Prosecution of Nazi War Criminals for 2005, ranked the Government under the category "total failure." The category listed the countries that refused in principle to prosecute suspected Nazi war criminals, despite clear evidence that such individuals were residents within their borders. In May 2006, the Simon Wiesenthal Center criticized the state for delays in the investigation of four suspected Romanian Nazi war criminals cases. The center had previously brought the four suspects to the Government's attention as part of the center's ongoing "Last Chance" operation to uncover unpunished perpetrators of the Holocaust.

In 2002, the Parliament passed legislation that could bar the return to the country of citizens who participated in Nazi war crimes but left the country during or after World War II. This includes individuals who lied about their participation in atrocities to obtain nationality in other countries, notably the United States. Embassy and other U.S. officials expressed strong concern about this legislation as well as the refusal of the country to accept the return of war criminals, noting that it represented a failure of the country to recognize the participation of its nationals in the Holocaust and to accept official responsibility.

The Government failed to take any action to reverse the 1997 decision by the Supreme Court to rehabilitate two war criminals, colonels Radu Dinulescu and Gheorghe Petrescu, who previously had been convicted of direct complicity in activities associated with the Holocaust in Romania.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There is no law against proselytizing, nor is there a clear understanding by the authorities of what activities constitute proselytizing. Although proselytizing is protected by law, several minority religious groups, which include both recognized and unrecognized religions, made credible complaints that low-level government officials and Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts to proselytize, interfered in religious activities, and otherwise discriminated against them during the period covered by this report.

Few politicians sponsored bills and measures that would oppose the Orthodox Church. Local officials tended to be tolerant, 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-Romanian Orthodox religious groups.

Representatives of religious groups that sought recognition after 1990 alleged that the registration process was arbitrary and unduly influenced by the Romanian Orthodox Church, and that they did not receive clear instructions concerning the requirements. The Organization of the Orthodox Believers of Old Rite, the Adventist Movement for Reform, the Baha'i Faith, and the Mormons were among the religious groups that tried unsuccessfully to register as religions after 1990. Local leaders of the Baha'i Faith stated again that, during the period covered by the report, they

did not seek registration because government officials told them that the group's status cannot be changed under the existing legislation. It took the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs three years to recognize Jehovah's Witnesses on the basis of a 2000 court ruling. The Mormons declared that, during the period covered by the report, the group repeatedly and unsuccessfully raised the issue with relevant government officials.

One reason that the Secretariat provided as an explanation for the failure to register new religions was that recognition requires a decree issued by the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, a communist-era institution that no longer exists. Since no new legislation has been passed in this regard, the Secretariat stated that the registration of any new religion was not possible. Many minority religious groups pointed out that the proposed draft law on religion would still not provide the opportunity for new organizations to register, given the inordinately high thresholds set in the draft law.

Unrecognized religions receive no financial support from the Government, other than limited tax and import duty exemptions, and are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities.

Although, since February 2005, approval by a national commission for the construction of places of worship is no longer required, minority religions continued to encounter difficulties in obtaining construction permits at the local level. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that, in some localities, mayors and municipal councils obstructed their plans to build places of worship by illegally conditioning permits on the agreement of all neighbors in the area or claiming that only certain types of construction can be built in a particular district. In Calarasi, Calarasi County, the Jehovah's Witnesses won a court ruling in December 2005 after local officials obstructed the construction of a place of worship in August 2004, but the mayor's office again appealed the case. In Odorheiu Secuiesc, Covasna County, the municipal council had not enforced a December 2005 court ruling in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In Bistrita, the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation has tried to obtain a construction permit since 2004 and, despite a court ruling in their favor, the mayor's office has not issued the permit. In Targoviste, Dambovita County, the Jehovah's Witnesses tried to obtain a construction permit for several years without success. In February 2006, after the Jehovah's Witnesses obtained a favorable court ruling in November 2005, the mayor's office in Targoviste finally issued the permit. In Panciu, Vrancea County, and Bals, Olt County, the mayors' offices eventually issued the construction permits during the period of the report, after the Jehovah's Witnesses took the issue to court and repeatedly requested the permits. Other religions experienced similar difficulties. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Carlibaba, Suceava County, could not obtain a permit to build a church after purchasing the land in 2000. The mayor refused to issue a permit on the grounds that the members were too few to warrant a church. The Baptist Church also reported similar cases; in Insuratei, Braila County, local officials repeatedly refused to grant a construction permit, arguing that the number of Baptist believers was too small, and that they would need a referendum on this issue. The central Government did not respond to the Baptist Church's complaints. The Greek Catholic Church reported the refusal by local officials to issue construction permits in Pesceana, Valcea County, and Sapanta, Maramures County.

The law does not prohibit or punish assembly for peaceful religious activities. However, several minority religious groups complained that local authorities and Orthodox priests prevented religious activities from taking place, even when the groups had been issued permits. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported difficulties in obtaining approvals to use public halls for religious activities following pressure by Orthodox priests. Even when they had rented public venues, on many occasions the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Baptist Church were forced to discontinue or cancel their religious programs. On November 20, 2005, in Dobridor, Dolj County, an Orthodox priest reportedly incited the local population to threaten the Seventh-day Adventist Church representatives with reprisals unless they stopped proselytizing. Some policemen were sent to attend the religious gatherings and defuse the situation. After involvement of the mayor in fruitful discussions, no further incidents occurred. Between August 2 and 4, 2005, during religious lectures sponsored by the Baptist Church in a rented facility in Babeni, Valcea County, four Orthodox priests allegedly tried to stop people from entering the venue and to disrupt the program, despite approval of the facility rental by the city hall. In Saliste, Sibiu County, after the Jehovah's Witnesses filed a series of complaints of discriminatory attitudes displayed by local authorities, the problem was resolved during the period covered by the report, when the discriminatory behaviors ceased. The Jehovah's Witnesses also won a lawsuit against the Saliste mayor's office, which had demanded taxes for the Jehovah's Witnesses' places of worship despite the group's sta-

tus as a religion. The mayor's office could appeal the court ruling, however. In Baia Mare, Maramures County, the mayor's office retroactively asked for tax payments incurred before 2003, the year in which the Jehovah's Witnesses acquired official religion status. The Jehovah's Witnesses took legal action against the mayor's office, since, according to a court ruling, it had been a religion since the year 2000. The lawsuit was in progress at the end of the period covered by the report.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses reports, in January 2006, the court of Dragasani, Valcea County, rejected on religious grounds the appeal of a member of this faith in a divorce lawsuit. The court ruling gave as one of the reasons for rejecting the appeal the plaintiff's religious beliefs.

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. In August 2005, the Csango community filed a complaint with the CNCD, which decided on October 27, 2005, that the act of denying religious services in the mother tongue is a restriction on religious freedom. In December 2005, the Bishopric challenged the CNCD decision in court, and the case was still pending by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Attendance in classes is optional. Only the eighteen recognized religions are entitled to hold religion classes in public schools. While the law permits instruction according to the faith of students' parents, some minority recognized religious groups complained that they were unable to have classes offered in their faith in public schools. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Baptist Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report such cases. According to minority religious groups, the local inspectors for religion classes are typically Orthodox priests who deny accreditation to teachers of other religions. According to Greek Catholic reports, some school directors denied access in their schools to teachers of Greek Catholic religion. The Baptist Church also reported such a case in Tecuci, Galati County. Religious teachers are permitted to instruct only students of the same religious faith. However, minority religious groups, including the Greek Catholic Church, credibly asserted that there were cases of children pressured to attend classes of Orthodox religion, as happened repeatedly in the Greek Catholic eparchy of Oradea. The Baptist Church complained that some public schools indirectly forced students belonging to this faith to attend Orthodox religion classes in schools where Baptist religion classes were not taught. According to Baptist Church representatives, Orthodox religion classes were scheduled deliberately in these schools in the middle of the day so that Baptist students were required to attend, since they were not allowed to leave school early. 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, such as in Vaslui and Braila counties. The Baptist Church also reported cases, for example in Hotar, Bihor County, 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 out 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, all students, irrespective of their religious affiliation, must attend Orthodox religious services. The same reportedly continued to happen in the Army.

Until February 2006, only recognized religions were entitled to give religious assistance to prisoners; regulations on religious assistance in penitentiaries forbid proselytizing. The prison priest (always an Orthodox priest) had the responsibility to coordinate religious assistance in prisons. Some NGOs reported that prisoners were pressured against changing their religions, and that, in many cases, Orthodox priests attended the meetings of representatives of other religions with the prisoners. Minority recognized religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, asserted that Orthodox priests denied them access to some penitentiaries. The prison priest from the Orthodox Church denied the Seventh-day Adventist Church access to the penitentiary in Gherla, Cluj County; they also could not enter the penitentiary in Aiud, Alba County.

In August 2005, in response to a complaint filed by NGO Association for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania—The Helsinki Committee, the CNCD concluded that the legal provisions on military clergy and the agreement between the Ministry of Justice and the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding religious assistance in penitentiaries discriminate against minority religions by granting a privileged role

to the Orthodox Church. The CNCD recommended that the Ministry of Justice eliminate the discriminatory provisions from the law.

On February 17, 2006, the Ministry of Justice changed the regulations for religious assistance in detention places. The new regulations provide for unrestricted access of recognized religions and religious associations to any type of detention places, even if their assistance is not specifically requested. According to the new rules, 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 religious group in question actually endangers the security of the detention place. The regulations also forbid any interference of 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 new regulations were not uniformly applied, however, when the Jehovah's Witnesses requested access from the ANP to the penitentiary in Baia Mare, Maramures County. In March 2006, the ANP required the group to sign an agreement of cooperation with the penitentiary and to provide details of their religious assistance programs before they were given access. After the Jehovah's Witnesses submitted another access request in April, emphasizing that the new legislation permits unconditional access to prisons, the ANP in May allowed Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries to gain entry to the Baia Mare penitentiary without any further stipulations.

The law entitles recognized religions to have military clergy trained to render religious assistance to conscripts. According to minority religions, however, the military clergy is comprised only of Orthodox priests, with the exception of two representatives of the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Alliance.

Media reported that, in September 2005, the Bucharest city hall illegally approved a permit for a property developer to construct a nineteen-story building directly next to the Roman Catholic Saint Joseph Cathedral, a historical monument in downtown Bucharest. The media alleged possible corruption or nepotism by Bucharest officials in granting the permit. In addition, after construction began at the site in May 2006, the Holy See and the Roman Catholic metropolitan archbishop released public statements protesting the decision to allow construction of a large building that they claimed would damage the structural foundation of the cathedral. More than 1,000 Roman Catholic Church members also held street protests against the construction. In May 2006, the Orthodox Church issued a public statement sharing the concerns of the Roman Catholic Church. Media also reported that a large building constructed by the same property developer near the Armenian church in Bucharest permanently ruined that church's structure.

Some NGOs and religious groups reported that the national identity card application form includes a section requesting completion of the applicant's religious affiliation. They expressed concerns that the accumulated data can be used to discriminate against non-Orthodox believers.

The Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA), a yoga organization, complained of repeated alleged persecution, harassment, abuse, and discrimination by the authorities for their spiritual opinions and beliefs. Members also claimed that their organization was the subject of a negative media campaign. In December 2005, the leader of this movement received asylum in Sweden on the grounds of being harassed.

Some religious groups complained that the National Audio-Visual Council made it difficult for radio frequency licenses to be purchased for religious broadcasting. Minority religions complained of a lack of provisions to provide for the free access of religious groups to state-owned media.

The Baha'i Faith complained that newspaper companies repeatedly rejected its request to publish paid articles, once after a contract had been signed and the Baha'i Faith paid the fees.

In many cases, religious minorities have not succeeded in regaining possession of properties, despite restitution by these decrees. Many properties returned by decree contain 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. In July 2005, new legislation to improve the process of property restitution came into effect. The law clarified and simplified the procedures for property restitution; broadened the scope of restitution; established new application deadlines and fines for the officials who hindered the process; and created a $4 billion (ROL 117,884 billion) property fund to pay damages to former owners for properties that cannot be returned in kind. These provisions resolved some of the impediments to property restitution in earlier legislation that

were criticized by religious denominations, i.e., not restituting the land of demolished buildings and not providing for compensation. Although the large majority of restitution cases of religious property remained unresolved, the pace of restitution increased slightly during the period covered by this report as a result of the new legislation. In many cases, local authorities refused to turn over restituted properties in which county or municipal governments had an interest and challenged the decisions of the Special Restitution Commission in court. There were many complaints that the local authorities consistently delayed supplying information about the reclaimed properties to the Special Restitution Commission, thereby obstructing the restitution process, despite the fines stipulated by the new legislation for such delays. The Office of Property Restitution reported at the end of the reporting period, however, that local authorities were improving with regard to supplying information. The number of restitution claims submitted by religious denominations increased because of the six-month extension of the deadline for the submission of claims, i.e., until January 25, 2006. The compensation process had not begun by June 30, 2006.

Law 501/2002 should provide for the restitution of all church properties. The buildings used by public institutions (such as museums, schools, and hospitals) are to remain in tenants' hands for a period of three or five 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 to this category. However, this law does not address the distinctive and sensitive issue of the Greek Catholic churches, which were confiscated under communist rule in 1948 and handed over to the Orthodox Church. The July 2005 legislation again delayed solving the problem and stated that the issue would be addressed separately. By the initial March 2, 2003 deadline, religious denominations submitted 7,568 applications for restitution according to Law 501; by the 6-month extended deadline at the end of 2005, the number increased to 14,716 as follows: Orthodox Church, 2,215; Roman Catholic Church, 1,203; Greek Catholic Church, 6,723; Reformed Church, 1,208; Jewish, 1,918; Evangelical Church, 1,147; and other denominations, 303. The Special Commission for Restitution started its activity in 2003 and had restituted 1,592 buildings by the end of the period covered by this report. A total of 855 buildings were restituted during the period covered by this report, a much higher number than in previous years.

There were several high profile properties restituted during the period covered by the report. For example, in December 2005, the Government restituted to the German Language Evangelical Church the buildings of the well-known Bruckenthal Museum in Sibiu County, together with the museum's art collections.

The Greek Catholic Church was the second largest denomination (approximately 1.5 million adherents out of a population of approximately 15 million) in 1948 when communist authorities outlawed it and dictated its forced merger with the Romanian Orthodox Church. At the time of its banning, the Greek Catholic Church owned more than 2,600 churches and monasteries, which were confiscated by the state and then given to the Orthodox Church, along with other facilities. Other properties of the Greek Catholic Church, such as buildings and agricultural land, became state property.

Since 1989, the Greek Catholic Church, which has very few places of worship, has been given back fewer than 200 churches from the Orthodox Church. Many followers were still compelled to hold services in public places—more than 220 cases, according to Greek Catholic reports. In Sisesti, Mehedinti County, services had to be held in the open. In 1992, the Government adopted a decree that listed eighty properties that were not places of worship owned by the Greek Catholic Church to be returned. After the restitution of sixty to sixty-five properties, mostly only on paper, no further progress was made. The most important buildings, including three schools in Cluj, were not restituted. Separately, the Greek Catholic Church accused the Bucharest mayor's office of having blocked the restitution of one of the eighty properties.

Some Orthodox priests, whose families were originally Greek Catholics, converted back to Greek Catholicism after 1989 and also brought their parishes and churches to the Greek Catholic Church. In the early 1990s, the Orthodox Archbishop of Timisoara, Nicolae Corneanu, returned to the Greek Catholics approximately fifty churches in his diocese that belonged to the Greek Catholic Church, including the cathedral in Lugoj. However, because of his actions, the archbishop experienced criticism from the Orthodox Holy Synod and his fellow Orthodox clergymen, several of whom opposed any type of dialogue between the two denominations. Relations between the Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Archbishopric of Timisoara continued to be amicable and cooperative. The Orthodox Bishopric of Caransebes continued to hold 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 did not follow through with a commitment to enter a dialogue with the Greek Catholic Church. The Orthodox Bishop of Arad, Ienopole, and Halmagiu also did not agree to a proposal by the Greek Catholic Church to hold alternating church services in churches that were historically Greek Catholic. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Orthodox Bishopric had returned no church to the Greek Catholics. Between July 1, 2005, and April 2006, the Greek Catholic Church recovered only five churches nationwide, the same number as in the previous year.

A 1990 government decree set up a joint Orthodox and Greek Catholic committee at the national level to resolve the situation of former Greek Catholic churches. The committee met for the first time in 1998, had three meetings in 1999, and then met annually after 2000; however, the Orthodox Church resisted efforts to resolve the problem in this forum. In many cases, the courts refused to consider Greek Catholic lawsuits seeking restitution, citing the 1990 decree establishing the joint committee to resolve the issue. In June 2005, Parliament passed into law a 2004 decree permitting the Greek Catholic Church to resort to court action whenever the bilateral dialogue regarding the restitution of churches with the Orthodox Church fails. Parliament initially rejected the decree but passed it after the president refused to sign the rejection law.

On November 20, 2005, after the intervention of the prime minister and the minister of culture and religious affairs, the Orthodox Church returned a cathedral in central Oradea to the Greek Catholic Church; however, despite the Orthodox Patriarch's promise to also restitute a major cathedral in Gherla, Cluj County, and a church in Bucharest, the Greek Catholic Church had not received the churches by the end of the period covered by this report.

From the initial property list of 2,600 seized churches, the Greek Catholic Church had reduced the number of its claims to fewer than 300. According to reports from the Greek Catholic Church, only sixteen churches were restituted as the result of the joint committee's meetings. 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 religions were at stake.

The joint committee has practically ceased its activity since 2004, after the Orthodox Church expressed dissatisfaction with the Greek Catholic Church's answer to a letter that urged dialogue rather than court actions. The two churches did not resume dialogue through this committee during the period covered by the report.

Despite the stated desire for dialogue, the Orthodox Church demolished Greek Catholic churches under various pretexts. Greek Catholic churches—some declared historical monuments—were demolished in Vadu Izei, Maramures County; Baisoara, Cluj County; Smig, Sibiu County; Tritenii de Jos, Cluj County; Craiova, Dolj County; Valea Larga, Mures County; Bont, Cluj County; Calarasi, Cluj County; Solona, Salaj County; and Urca, Cluj County. Another church faced unauthorized demolition in Ungheni, Mures County. In Ungheni, the Orthodox Church continued construction of a new church which was being built around the Greek Catholic church.

On May 9, 2006, in Taga, Cluj County, members of the Orthodox Church demolished overnight a rundown Greek Catholic church, despite an injunction issued by the Government forbidding its demolition or the construction of a new church. An ownership lawsuit was ongoing between the Greek Catholic and the Orthodox churches over the property at the time the demolition took place. The Orthodox priest in Taga was fined approximately $350 (ROL 10 million) for the illegal demolition. Orthodox Church members in Taga were building a new church on the same premises during the reporting period. Following the Greek Catholic complaints, the construction work for the new Orthodox church stopped in June 2006. The Greek Catholic Church also complained to the President's Office about the church's destruction. In Belotint, Arad County, a dilapidated Greek Catholic church also faced imminent demolition after the Orthodox Church repeatedly refused to return it to the Greek Catholics.

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. The lawsuit over the ownership of the church has moved slowly since it was filed in 2001. On August 15, 2005, the Greek Catholic Bishop of Cluj-Gherla sent a letter to the prime minister asking for intervention to help preserve the Nicula Monastery. The Greek Catholic Bishop had reportedly not received a reply from the prime minister by the end of the period of this report. A similar case was reportedly developing in Orastie, Hunedoara County, where the Orthodox Church

began construction of a building close to the former Greek Catholic church, 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.

The Special Commission for Restitution, under Law 501/2002, returned to date 318 of the 6,723 properties claimed for restitution by the Greek Catholic Church. Thirty-three of these were returned between July 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006.

In April 2005, Greek Catholic believers in the country and throughout the world redistributed a 2002 memorandum to the state authorities complaining about discrimination against their Church and calling for the restitution of the Greek Catholic churches and other assets confiscated under communist rule. The only reaction by the authorities came from the state secretary for religious denominations, who replied in a letter that the issue of the Greek Catholic churches was complex and sensitive, and that the establishment of the commission for dialogue was a wise solution.

Local and state authorities also ignored numerous letters and appeals complaining about discrimination against the Greek Catholic Church, sent by Greek Catholic bishops and priests over the years. The authorities also did not respond to street protests by Greek Catholics.

Many lawsuits filed by the Greek Catholic Church remained delayed by the courts, often impeded by constant appeals by the Orthodox Church. In November 2005, for example, after a lawsuit that lasted fifteen years, the Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the Greek Catholic Church in its attempt to regain a major church in Bucharest. The Orthodox Church appealed the ruling, but the High Court of Cassation and Justice rejected the appeal on June 15, 2006. The Greek Catholic Church also brought the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which had not issued a decision by the end of the period covered by this report.

Historical Hungarian churches, including Roman Catholic as well as Protestant churches (Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian), have received a small number of their properties from the Government. Churches from these denominations were closed but not seized by the communist regime; however, the communist regime confiscated many of these groups' secular properties, which were being used for public schools, museums, libraries, post offices, and student dormitories.

Approximately 80 percent of the buildings confiscated from Hungarian churches are used as public facilities (schools, hospitals, or museums). Of approximately 3,000 buildings confiscated by the communist regime from Hungarian churches, only 33 were restituted by government decrees between 1996 and 2000. However, Hungarian churches could not take possession of all of them because of lawsuits and opposition of current occupants. In the case of the Batthyanaeum Library, the Roman Catholic Church remained unsuccessful in obtaining the return of the building, despite a 2003 favorable court ruling obtained after a five-year lawsuit. The Church filed a complaint with the ECHR right after the issuance of the court ruling, and a decision was still pending. The Roman Catholic Church submitted a complaint to the minister of culture and religious affairs during the winter of 2005, which remained unanswered. During the reporting period, the Roman Catholic Church and the Special Commission for Restitution reportedly began to discuss potential solutions for the restitution of the building before the ECHR rules on the case. The Roman Catholic bishop's palace in Oradea was only partially restituted in 2003, in accordance with an agreement between a local museum, its current user, and the Roman Catholic Bishopric. The museum closed during the period of the report and, in November 2005, the Roman Catholic Church received three more rooms; however, restitution of the remaining portions of the building remained impeded by slow movement of museum holdings to their new location. The Special Commission for Restitution, using Law 501/2002, had restituted in principle 583 of the approximately 2,700 reclaimed buildings 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 mayor of Cluj and president of one of the ruling coalition parties reportedly opposed the restitution of three buildings to the Unitarian Church, all of which the Church should have received in December 2004 under the law on religious property. The mayor's office challenged the decisions in court, which ruled in the Unitarian Church's favor. The Unitarian Church took partial possession of one building and was waiting for court papers concerning the other two to be issued.

The Jewish community has received forty-two buildings by government decree. Of these structures, the community took partial or full possession of thirty-six buildings. In many cases, restitution was being delayed by lawsuits. The community was able to reclaim land only in Iasi, where it received fifteen plots of land (of former synagogues and schools) between 1999 and 2000, as well as three additional plots

during the period covered by this report. However, eighteen land claims of the Jewish community remained unresolved in Iasi, including a plot of land that, although claimed by the Jewish community in 1998, was divided and distributed to other persons by the prefect. In this case, the county land restitution commission decided to give different plots in compensation for the one that was sold, but the decision was challenged in court by the National Agency of State Domains. Under Law 501/2002, 197 additional buildings had been returned to the Jewish community, of which 142 were restituted during the period covered by this report. The users of ten of the buildings restituted by the Special Restitution Commission challenged the restitution decisions in court, and lawsuits were in progress. During the period covered by this report, the Jewish community obtained one additional building by court ruling.

In 2004, Parliament adopted a law stipulating 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 "public interest" will remain in the hands of the present users for either three or five 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. By the deadline of September 30, 2004, ethnic communities had submitted 1,930 claims, of which 1,744 belonged to the Jewish community. During the six-month deadline extension for submission of claims ending on January 25, 2006, the number of claims reached 2,156 cases, of which 1,852 belonged to the Jewish community. The new provision regarding compensation for buildings that cannot be returned in kind applies to this law, too. During the reporting period, seventy-nine buildings were restituted under this law.

Another problem with restitution was often 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.

According to Law 1/2000, which addresses the restitution of farm and forest lands, religious denominations were initially entitled to only a limited amount of land. The new July 2005 legislation, however, greatly increased the scope and number of properties that religious denominations could seek for restitution. When properties cannot be restituted, religious denominations are also eligible for compensation through receipt of comparable properties or shares in the property fund. The Greek Catholic Church complained that, in many regions where it had claimed farm and forest land, local authorities, under the influence of the Orthodox Church, opposed restitution or proposed restitution to all religious denominations in direct proportion to the number of their believers. Such was the case in Moisei, Maramures County, and in Hunedoara and Cluj counties. One parliamentary party belonging to the ruling coalition proposed a bill at the end of 2005 that stipulated proportional restitution of churches, assets, and land. The Greek Catholic Church separately reported that it could not obtain the return of 40,000 square meters of land in Bucharest because of resistance from the Bucharest mayor's office.

The Orthodox Archbishopric of Suceava and Radauti also complained that the authorities opposed the restitution of 192,000 hectares of forest land to the Orthodox Church Fund of Bucovina, a precommunist foundation. They accused the county land restitution commission headed by the Suceava County prefect of imposing certain conditions that hinder restitution. On May 3, 2006, many priests from the Archbishopric of Suceava participated in a march of silence in Suceava town to protest the authorities' refusal to restitute the land.

Amendments to the constitution enacted in October 2003 allow the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the state. However, this provision was not implemented.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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 vandalism against Jewish sites, continued during the period covered by this report. The extreme nationalist press continued to publish anti-Semitic articles. The Legionnaires (also called the Iron Guard, an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi group that existed in the country in the interwar period) continued to republish inflammatory books from the interwar period.

In 2003, a contributor to one of the Legionnaire magazines, the Timisoara-based Gazeta de Vest (Western Gazette), was sentenced to thirty months' imprisonment

for the dissemination of nationalist-chauvinistic propaganda and fascist symbols, a ruling he appealed. In February 2006, after a lengthy lawsuit, he was acquitted.

In 2004, authorities charged an individual with distributing nationalistic-chauvinistic and fascist propaganda; although he received an eighteen-month sentence in prison, the trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. During a search, the police found a large number of neo-Nazi flyers, magazines, and extreme-right publications in the defendant's home and on his computer.

In February 2005, the Iron Guard monthly Obiectiv Legionar (Legionnaire Focus) was distributed in Parliament, where the chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the Senate called for a ban of the magazine. The relevant authorities did not take any action to stop the publication. The magazine, which began publication in 2003, primarily carried old Legionnaire literature and was distributed by a press distribution company, which also distributed another Legionnaire publication, Cuvintul Legionar (Legionnaire Opinion), in several of the largest cities, including Bucharest.

In 2004, the metal hood used to cover a Marshal Antonescu statue located in the yard of an Orthodox church in Bucharest was removed and replaced by a tri-color ribbon. The slogan, "Antonescu—national hero," was written on the church wall close by. The perpetrator was not identified. Following complaints by the Jewish community to the authorities, the statue was covered again and the graffiti removed. In September 2005, unidentified individuals again removed the covering, which was eventually put back in place following similar complaints.

In 2004, Nazi and anti-Semitic signs were found on the interior walls of the Jewish cemetery in Sarmasu, Cluj County. Neo-Nazi graffiti were discovered on the door of the home of a member of the Bucharest Jewish community, who filed a complaint with the police. In January 2005, Nazi symbols and anti-Semitic graffiti were found on a building in Suceava inhabited by a married couple that survived the Holocaust. In April 2005, similar symbols were found on a garage in Galati. None of the perpetrators were identified in these cases.

During the first Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2004, some extremists made several attempts to undermine the commemoration and deny the existence of the Holocaust in Romania. During the national electoral campaign in 2004, the extreme nationalist New Generation Party adopted for its electoral campaign a slogan used by the 1930s anti-Semitic Legionnaire Movement: "I swear to God to make Romania into a country like the holy sun in the sky." In 2004, the Organization of Jewish Youth in Timisoara also received threatening and intimidating anti-Semitic messages. The authorities did not react to these cases.

In January 2005, police and prosecutors in Buzau initiated criminal prosecution against a seventeen-year-old male for creating an anti-Semitic website which incited violence against two teenagers of the Jewish community in that town; a decision was pending.

In March 2005, a university professor in Sibiu published an article denying the Holocaust in Romania. In August 2005, the Federation of the Jewish Communities and other Jewish organizations filed a legal complaint with the Prosecutor's Office in Sibiu against the professor for denying the Holocaust. In October 2005, the Prosecutor's Office decided that the professor's action could not be interpreted as a crime as described by the 2002 decree forbidding Holocaust denial. An appeal filed by the Jewish organizations was rejected in November 2005.

In April 2005, unidentified persons vandalized the headquarters of the Jewish community in Focsani, Vrancea County. In May 2005, nine graves were desecrated in a Jewish cemetery in Ploiesti, Prahova County. On May 17, 2005, a synagogue was desecrated in Radauti, Suceava County; nothing was stolen, but the Torah scrolls were vandalized. The Federation of the Jewish Communities notified the state authorities of these incidents.

On July 5, 2005, unidentified persons stole the iron fences surrounding fifty graves and the metal doors of two burial vaults in a Jewish cemetery in Barlad, Vaslui County. In August 2005, a swastika was found on the walls of an old synagogue in Cluj. Perpetrators were not identified.

In October 2005, police began investigating one adult and three juveniles who reportedly drew Nazi symbols on the walls of a synagogue in Targu Mures at the end of September 2005. The police halted the investigation after the suicide of the adult who had been the primary suspect.

The New Right organization (also with Legionnaire orientation) continued to sponsor yearly marches, followed by religious services, to commemorate Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Legionnaire Movement. The last march took place in November 2005.

In November 2005, a university professor and Holocaust denier published an anti-Semitic article in Romania Mare, a magazine controlled by the extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party. The article asserted that the country was the target of a

Jewish invasion. The Federation of Jewish Communities reacted by filing a criminal complaint and by issuing a statement that urged relevant government institutions to take concrete measures to eradicate anti-Semitism and xenophobia. In January 2006, the police began investigating the professor for nationalist-chauvinistic propaganda.

On November 5, 2005, swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans were found on the walls of a vocational school and a neighboring block of apartments in Suceava. The police identified the perpetrators, and their prosecution began the same month; a decision remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

On November 18, 2005, the doors of two synagogues in Dorohoi, Botosani County, were damaged, apparently by vandals.

On January 20, 2006, the police arrested a twenty-year-old for throwing stones at the window of the Jewish Theatre in Bucharest. According to police reports, he was apparently mentally ill and was hospitalized in a specialized clinic.

On March 17, 2006, unidentified individuals stole eight steel poles from the fence of the Jewish cemetery in Sighisoara. On March 24, 2006, unidentified individuals vandalized twenty tombs in the Jewish cemetery in Resita, generating damages amounting to approximately $45 thousand (35 thousand euros). The Federation of Jewish Communities notified the authorities in these cases, but the perpetrators were not identified.

During the night of May 5, 2006, two minors drew two swastikas on the walls of the Lutheran church in Cluj. The police fined them, and the Lutheran Church also filed a penal complaint, saying that the perpetrators offended a religious denomination. Lutheran Church officials also questioned publicly whether the vandalism was linked to the fact that the government of Israel in 2005 had recognized, post mortem, the efforts of one of the pastors in the parish who hid Jews in the church during Nazi occupation. The case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In May 2006, swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti appeared on the walls of a house in Bucharest. Perpetrators were not identified.

On June 1, 2006, Vatra Romaneasca (Romanian Hearth) Union, a nationalistic NGO, the Marshal Antonescu League, and the Party of the United Left, a tiny, nonparliamentary party, invited the population to a religious service to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of Antonescu's death. The Federation of Jewish Communities filed a complaint, based on the law punishing racist, xenophobic, pro-Nazi propaganda and banning organizations that disseminate such ideas, against the three sponsors of the event. Police sent the complaint to the Prosecutor's Office of the High Court of Cassation and Justice.

On June 17 and 18, 2006, newly painted swastikas were found on several buildings in downtown Cluj, Cluj County, mostly on ethnic Hungarian-related buildings, including the Reformed church and the Hungarian-language Bathory Istvan High School.

During the reporting period, anti-Semitic views and attitudes were expressed during talk shows broadcast by private television stations Antena 1, National TV, DDTV, and Pro-TV. The television stations failed to respond to any complaints made by the Jewish organizations on this issue.

According to MCA Romania, authorities tended to minimize the significance of such incidents, usually explaining them as being the actions of children, drunkards, or persons with mental disorders.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to make substantial progress in recognizing and teaching the true history of the Holocaust in Romania. In August 2005, the Government decided to erect a Holocaust memorial in Bucharest and to establish the new Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. The Institute was officially inaugurated on October 10, 2005. In October 2005, the Government launched the first textbook on the Holocaust in Romania, and commemorated the second annual National Holocaust Remembrance Day with high profile events and speeches throughout the country. The Government commemorated the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Bucharest pogrom in January 2006 and the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Iasi pogrom in June 2006.

Although the pace of restitution remained slow, the Special Commission for Restitution returned several significant buildings to religious denominations.

In February 2006, the Government issued new regulations regarding religious assistance in penitentiaries. The new regulations allow the free access of all religious groups to prisons.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups. There is no law against proselytizing. However, the Romanian Orthodox Church repeatedly criticized the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church repeatedly described as "sects." This led to conflicts in some cases. The press also reported several cases in which adherents of minority religions were prevented by others from practicing their faith, and local law enforcement authorities did not protect them.

The predominance of the Orthodox Church over the last several hundred years, along with its status as the majority religion, has contributed to its reluctance, in particular at the local level, and sometimes with the support of low-level officials, to tolerate other religions. Consequently, actions by other religious groups to attract members frequently are perceived by the Orthodox Church as attempts to diminish the number of its members. Minority religious groups alleged that some members of the Orthodox clergy provoked isolated incidents of organized group intimidation.

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. There were also reported incidents where children were reportedly forced by teachers at school to declare their faith and then were harassed. According to the Church's reports, its missionaries were repeatedly and consistently the subject of harassment and violence. In September 2005, four individuals in Constanta reportedly physically assaulted two missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and threatened to kill one them at knifepoint. Police intervened, and one perpetrator was reportedly fined. In November 2005, two Mormon missionaries were physically assaulted in Iasi, Iasi County, by an individual who tried to push them down a flight of stairs and hit one of them with a bottle. The police intervened, and the perpetrator was charged with assault. The court fined the perpetrator and required an official apology. On May 7, 2006, two Mormon missionaries were assaulted and injured by a man in Bucharest. The police fined the individual approximately $70 (ROL 2 million).

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, such as in Dofteana, Bacau County, where, in 2004, the mayor, apparently under influence of the Orthodox priest, obstructed activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses and warned them to cease their door-to-door ministry. In January and March 2005, the Jehovah's Witnesses were physically assaulted by some residents of Dofteana, and the police did not protect them. On February 4, 2006, two members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were assaulted by an Orthodox priest. When they filed a complaint with the local police, the policemen purportedly warned them to not return to Dofteana.

The Jehovah's Witnesses also reported verbal and physical abuse by an Orthodox priest and two individuals, all of them allegedly drunk, in Focsani, Vrancea County, on August 11, 2005. Police fined the three individuals. Similar alleged physical abuse against a group of Jehovah's Witnesses by an Orthodox priest occurred several times in Breasta, Dolj County, in November and December 2005. Police in Breasta allegedly ignored the complaints filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In February 2006, in Topile, Iasi County, an Orthodox priest and a group of drunk individuals allegedly assaulted with clubs a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. Orthodox priests also physically assaulted members of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Lupcina, Suceava County, on February 25, 2006; in Branesti, Gorj County, on March 26, 2006; and in Cosereni, Ialomita County, on April 2, 2006. Police did not take any measures against the assailants.

In the small town of Mizil, Prahova County, the local Orthodox church reportedly continued a persistent discrediting campaign against a small congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The mayor, along with Orthodox priests and the police, continued an anti-Jehovah's Witnesses campaign that began in 1997 in an attempt to stop the church's activity in Mizil. In 2004, despite repeated complaints filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses, the mayor issued a resolution forbidding any actions of proselytizing. In April 2005, the CNCD reprimanded school authorities and the mayor of Mizil for harassing and discriminating against a Jehovah's Witnesses teacher who was also told by the school director that he would be dismissed. The mayor alleged that the teacher was proselytizing in school and that two school inspectors forced him to choose between his faith and his job. In April 2005, the CNCD also fined the mayor approximately $220 (ROL 6 million) for publishing discriminatory articles

against the Jehovah's Witnesses in the city hall's monthly publication. The city hall and the two inspectors challenged the CNCD decisions, and on November 16, 2005, the Mizil court of first instance ruled in their favor based on a procedural flaw and eliminated the fine; however, the CNCD decision of discrimination remained valid.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported similar incidents with Orthodox priests in several localities, including Milas, Bistrita Nasaud County, in 2004 and 2005, and other localities with smaller congregations. 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.

The Baptist Church reported that, during the period covered by the report, the Baptist community of Satu Mare and Oradea counties filed a formal complaint regarding a group of individuals who repeatedly disrupted the Baptist religious services in Botiz, Satu Mare County. Local police allegedly did not intervene, claiming they could not take action against the perpetrators in the absence of a specific court order.

The Reformed Church in Oradea repeatedly complained that local authorities incited an interconfessional and interethnic conflict by allocating a sports playground which had, according to the Reformed Church, rightfully belonged to a reformed high school, to a local Orthodox parish in 2004. The local Orthodox parish intensified the conflict by locking up the playground, restricting access to the students, and leaving the high school in a state of de facto limbo. The Reformed Church responded by filing complaints to the local authorities and sponsoring several peaceful protests. The case remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by the report.

Minority religions credibly complained about the intolerant attitude of some Orthodox religion teachers, who in some instances have depicted non-Orthodox churches to students as "sects" and a danger to all who might wish to join them. According to a December 2005 incident reported by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, an Orthodox priest threw an Adventist translation of the Bible to the back of the classroom during a religion class in Piatra Neamt, Neamt County, and asked the grade school students to kick it.

In February 2006, Orthodox priests disrupted healthcare events organized by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tarzia-Brusturi, Dragomiresti, and Razboieni, all in Neamt County.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church 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 in isolated sections of the cemetery or if non-Orthodox religious services were not used. During the reporting period, such incidents were reported in Lipanesti, Prahova County; Jiblea, Valcea County; Cojasca, Dambovita County; Garbesti, Iasi County; and Ceahlau, Neamt County. To avoid such encounters, the Adventist Church asked the mayors' offices several years ago for land for cemeteries in a large number of localities where it had congregations, but it received positive answers to only 13 of its 700 requests. During the reporting period, the Seventh-day Adventist Church received a piece of land for cemetery use in Tecuci, Galati County. Orthodox priests also denied access for Greek Catholics to many cemeteries, such as those in Sapanta, Maramures County; Salva, Bistrita Nasaud County; Lucaceni, Satu Mare County; Pesceana, Valcea County; Ungheni, Mures County; Telec-Bicaz, Neamt County; Damuc, Neamt County; Bicaz-Chei, Neamt County; Magina, Alba County; Radesti, Alba County; and Vintu de Jos, Alba County. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also complained of being constantly denied access to cemeteries.

According to the local Muslim community, Bucharest city hall failed to respond to repeated requests by the Muslim community for land for a Muslim cemetery. This has led to difficulties in locating a proper burial ground for Romanian Muslims. During the period covered by the report, the city hall offered to allocate a plot that was insufficient in size. The Muslim community renewed its request and a decision remained pending. In June 2006, the mufti, official head of the Muslim community, wrote a letter to both the president and the prime minister complaining of the situation.

In January 2005, when a group of villagers, along with the Orthodox priest, switched to the Greek Catholic faith in Pesceana, the village's local council illegally forbade the registration of a Greek Catholic parish and the activities of the Greek Catholic church in the village. Police did not react to the Greek Catholics' complaints of verbal and physical abuse by Orthodox villagers and their priest. The local police chief was subsequently dismissed. An agreement mediated by the state secretary for religious denominations in May 2005 was disregarded by both parties soon after its signature. Following a complaint by a group of NGOs, the CNCD decided that the local council's decisions were discriminatory and reprimanded it at

the end of August 2005. Tensions continued, however, during the entire period covered by this report. The situation was aggravated further when the Greek Catholic priest and the church's members were repeatedly denied access to the local cemetery. A court ruling on January 19, 2006, allowing the Greek Catholic priest to enter the cemetery was appealed by the Orthodox Church, and the lawsuit remained ongoing. In April and May 2006, the mayor's office of Pesceana refused to issue a construction permit for a Greek Catholic church, asking the Greek Catholic parish to meet the requirements of Decree 177/1948, the communist religion law. The Greek Catholic Church also complained of the hostile attitude of the prefect of Valcea County toward the Greek Catholic congregation in Pesceana and of the illegal transfer by the local council of two communal cemeteries to the Orthodox Church.

A Greek Catholic Association complained to the minister of the administration and interior of the negative attitude of some prefects—such as those from Valcea and Satu Mare, and the Maramures and Alba counties—towards the Greek Catholic Church.

In January 2006, the decision of more than one hundred people to switch from the Orthodox to the Greek Catholic Church in Stei, Hunedoara County, also generated tensions. The Greek Catholic Church could not obtain possession of the rectory restituted in 2004 because the Orthodox Church appealed a restitution decision that had been in favor of the Greek Catholics. The Greek Catholics were also denied access to the only church in the village, which was Greek Catholic before the communist period. The Greek Catholic Church asked the Secretariat to mediate its dialogue with the Orthodox Church concerning alternative service in the church.

In April 2006, a similar situation occurred in Valea de Jos, Bihor County, when 350 of the approximately 400 villagers, together with the priest, decided to join the Greek Catholic faith and attempted to keep a church they had previously built.

Representatives of minority religions credibly complained that only Orthodox priests grant religious assistance in hospitals, children's homes, and shelters for the elderly. Charitable activities carried out by other churches in children's homes and shelters were often negatively interpreted as proselytizing. In one instance, an Orthodox priest forbade residents of a state-owned orphanage, including some young adults over age eighteen, from attending non-Orthodox religious services unless they were prepared to live elsewhere. He also hindered efforts by religious charities to visit that orphanage. In many cases, minority religions felt compelled to form nonreligious associations in order to gain access to public institutions to carry out charitable activities.

In April 2006, the New Right, an extreme-right xenophobic organization, developed a campaign in Cluj about "the danger" represented by "proselytizing sects." The organization distributed thousands of leaflets and confronted hundreds in an attempt to curb the increasing activity in the country of such "sects" that aimed at "destroying Orthodox Christianity."

Since the dialogue between the Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches came to a halt in 2004, disputes between the two religions' believers over church property increased 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. In Sapanta, Maramures County, the Greek Catholic Church decided to give up claims for its church and build a new one. For the last three years, however, the local council, under the influence of the Orthodox priest, refused to issue a construction permit. The Greek Catholic Church initiated a lawsuit. Similar tensions continued in Certeze, Satu Mare County, where the Greek Catholic Church was not permitted to build a new church on its land because of obstructions and harassment by the Orthodox Church and local authorities. Tensions continued in localities where the Orthodox Church refused to enforce court rulings that ordered restitution of churches to the Greek Catholic Church: Lupsa in Cluj County and Bogdan Voda in Maramures County were two examples. In Bogdan Voda, Maramures County, the Orthodox priest consistently refused to hand over the church that the Greek Catholic Church won in court in 2000.

In Prunis, Cluj County, where most of the residents belong to the Greek Catholic Church, tensions continued because of a long-standing lawsuit.

In Ardud, Satu Mare County, the Greek Catholic Church, which previously had owned the only church in the locality, built a new church to put an end to the long-standing conflict. However, the Orthodox Church took legal action and evicted the Greek Catholic priest (who had been an Orthodox priest) from the parish house in 2003 in the presence of numerous gendarmes and police. The Orthodox Church refused the Greek Catholics' proposal to help buy a new house for the Orthodox priest.

During the period covered by this report, tensions came to an end in Ardud after the construction of a new house by the Greek Catholic Church for its priest.

In most localities with two churches (one of which had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church) and only one Orthodox priest, priests frequently do one of three things: Hold alternate religious services between the two locations, keep the Orthodox church locked and hold the services in the former Greek Catholic churches, or establish a second Orthodox parish in the locality. However, more than eighteen former Greek Catholic churches remained closed.

On February 17, 2006, in Satu Mare, after sixteen years of lawsuits and delays, authorities enforced a ruling restituting a cathedral to the Greek Catholic Church.

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 refused to do so after the construction was over.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government actively discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and maintained active public outreach on the issue as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy also maintained close contact with a broad range of religious groups in the country, including the Islamic faith, and many minority religions. The ambassador and other embassy representatives regularly met 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 Romania, improvements in Holocaust education in school curricula, and implementation of the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. The embassy supported visiting delegations focusing on issues related to the Holocaust, including the Wiesel Commission. Embassy personnel and visiting U.S. officials repeatedly discussed the Holocaust in Romania with local and international members of the Wiesel Commission and supported the work of the commission. Among many other events, the charge d'affaires and other U.S. officials participated in the commemoration of Romania's National Holocaust Day in October 2005. In January 2006, the ambassador and other embassy personnel participated in events commemorating the anniversary of the Bucharest pogrom in Bucharest. In May 2006, the ambassador and the deputy director of the U.S. Department of State's Office of Holocaust Issues publicly addressed a roundtable at the Elie Wiesel Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. In July 2005, the embassy financed the travel of two high school teachers to a course in the United States on teaching the Holocaust. The embassy also supported activities of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in the country.

On repeated occasions, the ambassador and other embassy officials 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.

Embassy and other U.S. Government officials also continuously expressed concern to officials and encouraged revision of a 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 experts, the minister of culture and religious affairs, the prime minister, and the president. In July 2005, the ambassador sent a letter expressing clear concerns about the draft law to the minister of culture and religious affairs. The U.S. Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, commonly called the Helsinki Commission, expressed its concerns regarding the draft religion law in letters to the presidents of the relevant commissions of the Senate in October 2005, and of the Chamber of Deputies in March 2006. Helsinki Commission members also expressed concern directly to senior Romanian officials in Washington and Bucharest.

The embassy sponsored conferences on religious freedom in October 2005 and April 2006.

In addition, embassy staff members were in frequent contact with numerous NGOs that monitor developments in the country's religious life. U.S. officials continued to advocate in government circles for fair treatment on property restitution issues, including religious and communal properties, and for nondiscriminatory treatment of all religious groups.

RUSSIA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 deteriorated 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 and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations" (1997 Law) continued to seriously disadvantage many religious groups considered nontraditional. The Moscow Golovinskiy Intermunicipal District Court cited the 1997 Law as the basis for its March 2004 decision banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow, a decision that continued to have significant negative ramifications for the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses during the reporting period. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats.

Religious matters were not a source of social tension or problems for the large majority of citizens. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups, however, were negative in many regions, and there were 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 was often difficult to determine whether xenophobic, religious, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is at the heart of their national identity. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC occasionally disseminated negative publications and held meetings throughout the country against other religions considered non-traditional in the country, including alternative Orthodox congregations. Some ROC clergy have stated publicly their opposition to any expansion of the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other non-Orthodox denominations.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and engages a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The embassy and consulates work with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly support the implementation of these programs. The embassy and consulates maintain a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings. Mission officers look into possible violations of religious freedom and also raise the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). During the reporting period, the U.S. ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He also attended events on major religious holidays and regularly met with a range of religious leaders. Other Department of State and U.S. Government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 6,592,769 square miles, and its population is approximately 142.8 million. There were no reliable statistics that break down the population by denomination. Available information suggested approximately 70 percent of the residents considered themselves Russian Orthodox Christians, although the vast majority were not regular churchgoers. There were an estimated fourteen

to twenty-three million Muslims, constituting approximately 14 percent of the population and forming the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims lived in the Volga-Urals region—which included Tatarstan and Bashkortostan—and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia had notable Muslim populations as well. The Muslim communities in the Volga-Urals region and the North Caucasus are culturally and in some cases theologically distinct from one another and therefore must be considered separate communities.

According to the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, Protestants made up the second largest group of Christian believers, with approximately 3,500 organizations and more than 2 million followers. An estimated 600,000 to 1 million Jews (0.5 percent of the population) remained, following large-scale emigration over the last two decades; the Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC) estimated that up to 500,000 Jews lived in Moscow and 100,000 in St. Petersburg. These estimates significantly exceeded the results of the official government census. Between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews lived in the so-called Jewish Autonomous Oblast (region), located in the Far East. The Catholic Church estimated that there were from 600,000 to 1.5 million Catholics in the country, figures that also exceeded government estimates. Buddhism is traditional to three regions: Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya; and the Buddhist Association of Russia estimated there were between 1.5 and 2 million Buddhists. In some areas, such as Yakutiya and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions were practiced independently or alongside other religions.

According to Human Rights Ombudsman Lukin's annual report, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) had registered 22,513 religious organizations as of December 2005, approximately 500 more than January 2005 (22,092), an increase of approximately 1,500 registered organizations since 2002 and more than 5,500 since 1997. As of December 2005, the Federal Registration Service recorded the number of registered religious groups as follows: Russian Orthodox Church—12,214 groups, Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church—43, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad—30, True Orthodox Church—42, Russian Orthodox Free Church—10, Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate)—11, Old Believers—285 (representing 4 different Old Believer denominations), Roman Catholic—251, Greek Catholic—4, Armenian Apostolic—68, Muslim—3,668, Buddhist—197, Jewish—284 (divided among Orthodox and Reform groups), Evangelical Christians—740, Baptist—965, Pentecostal—1,486, Seventh-day Adventist—652, other evangelical and charismatic groups—72, Lutheran—228 (divided among 4 groups), New Apostolic—80, Methodist—115, Reformist—5, Presbyterian—187, Anglican—1, Jehovah's Witnesses—408, Mennonite—10, Salvation Army—10, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)(Mormon) Church—53, Unification Church—9, Church of the "Sovereign" Icon of the Mother of God—27, Molokane—27, Dukhobor—0, Church of the Last Covenant—7, Church of Christ—19, Judeo-Christians—2, nondenominational Christian—12, Scientologist—1, Hindu—1, Krishna—78, Baha'i—19, Tantric—2, Taoist—5, Assyrian—2, Sikh—1, Shamanist—14, Karaite—1, Zoroastrian—1, Spiritual Unity (Tolstoyan)—1, Living Ethic (Rerikhian)—1, pagan—8, other confessions—155.

The number of registered religious organizations does not reflect the entire demography of religious believers. For example, due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register or reregister; and other religious believers may not seek to be members of any organized religious group.

There were a large number of missionaries operating in the country, particularly from Protestant denominations.

An estimated 500 (official estimate) to more than 9,000 (Council of Muftis' estimate) Muslim organizations remained unregistered; some reportedly were defunct, but many, according to the Council of Muftis, have concluded that they did not require legal status and have postponed applying for financial reasons. Registration figures probably also underestimated the number of Pentecostal churches. As of May 2006, there were nearly 1,500 Pentecostal organizations officially registered (up from 1,467 in 2004) and 18 regional associations; statistics on the number of believers were unavailable. The difference in numbers can be explained by the fact that many Pentecostal churches remain unregistered. The Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists reported more than 1,000 registered churches, 549 unregistered groups, 7 regional associations, and more than 75,000 members. The Union of Seventh-Day Adventists estimated that there were 1,026 Adventist organizations in the country (more than 600 of them are registered with the Ministry of Justice) and more than 100,000 church followers. According to the Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (whose members included Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, and the Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith), there were 2,005 registered churches and unregistered groups, more than 180,000 members of the Church, and

67 regional central organizations. The total number of members of the Church and other evangelical believers was estimated at 320,000.

Some religious groups registered as social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations. In 2005 the Association of Christian Unification Churches reported that the drop in its registered organizations from seventeen in 2003 to five was due to local authorities hindering the association's attempt to reregister its local organizations. In 2006, it continued to report 5 registered organizations, approximately 30 unregistered groups, and 1,000 believers. The Moscow Monthly Friends' Meeting (Quakers) was an officially registered organization, although as of May 2006, it apparently was registered under "other faiths," as there was no Quaker organization listed in the MOJ registry.

In practice, only a minority of citizens participated actively in any religion. Many who identified themselves as members of a faith participated in religious life rarely or not at all.

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. The constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state; however, the Government did not always respect this provision.

The 1997 Law declared all religions equal before the law, prohibited government interference in religion, and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Although the 1997 Law did not recognize a state religion, its preamble recognized 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 history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." Public opinion widely considered Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism to be the only religions "traditional" to the country.

Implementing regulations took effect on April 10, 2006, for the Law on Public Associations (NGO Law), which President Putin signed on January 10, 2006. The 1997 Law remains the primary legislation governing religious organizations, but some provisions of the new NGO Law will apply to religious organizations as well. Although implementing regulations were in effect for too short a time in the reporting period to examine their effects on policy directives and subsequent implementation, the new law's inspection provisions are of particular concern since they appear to permit government inspections of religious organizations and attendance at some of their public events with advance notice. Although most of the provisions in the new law do not apply to religious organizations, the law appears to contain some provisions that apply, such as new reporting requirements; the authority for the registration body (located in the MOJ) to request certain documents, send its representatives to participate in events, and review on an annual basis compliance of an organizations' activities with its statutory goals; and a requirement that covered nonprofit organizations inform the registering body of changes to certain data within three days of the effectuation of the changes. In addition, the brief amendment to the Civil Code would also appear to reach religious organizations, but the effect of this amendment and all other amendments remains to be seen in how the authorities choose to implement the law. Local authorities in St. Petersburg, however, began an investigation of the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center, even before the new law's implementing regulations were agreed upon, but citing the new law as the cause and indicating that they would find any irregularity that would permit them to close down the center.

On March 10, 2006, President Putin signed a controversial anti-terrorism law, which critics charged was vaguely-worded, especially the provision that permits the banning of any organization "whose purposes and actions include the propaganda, justification, and support of terrorism."

In January 2005 authorities amended the 1997 Law to conform to a new law on state registration of other legal entities. The amended law requires all registered local religious organizations to inform the Federal Registration Service (FRS) within three days of a change in its leadership or legal address. If a local organization fails to meet this requirement on two or more occasions, the FRSD can file suit to dissolve and deregister the organization. Some denominations with numerous local organizations feared that compliance with this change will be highly burdensome.

Neither the constitution nor the 1997 Law accords explicit privileges or advantages to the four "traditional" religions; however, many politicians and public figures

argued for closer cooperation with them, and above all with the ROC. The ROC has entered into a number of agreements—some formal, others informal—with government ministries on such matters as guidelines for public education and law enforcement and customs decisions, giving the ROC far greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, the FSB, and the army. In November 2004 the ROC and the MVD extended an earlier agreement pursuant to which the two entities cooperate in efforts to combat extremism, terrorism, and drug addiction. Such efforts include, for example, ROC support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones and the holding of religious services for those serving there.

Many government officials and citizens equate Russian Orthodoxy with the national identity. This belief appears to have manifested itself in the church-state relationship. For example, the ROC has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Internal Affairs, and Emergency Situations, and other bodies, such as the Federal Tax Service, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces under the President. Not all of the details of these agreements were accessible, but available information indicated that the ROC received more favorable treatment than other denominations. Some government officials' public statements and anecdotal evidence from religious minorities suggested that increasingly since 1999, the ROC has enjoyed a status that approaches official. Although it was illegal, election campaign teams reportedly often included ROC clergy who frequently played a special role at official events at both the local and national level and who supported a close relationship with the State. Non-ordained ROC officials may participate in election campaigns but not as official church spokesmen. Nonetheless, policymakers remained divided on the State's proper relationship with the ROC and other churches.

The Rodina Duma faction and single-mandate deputies representing the People's Party have consistently supported a more official status for the ROC. The president, in contrast with his predecessors, has openly spoken of his belief in God, and greeted Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities on major religious holidays. He also meets periodically—last documented in September 2004—with members of the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations, which includes representatives of traditional religions and other major religious communities, such as the Protestants and Catholics, to discuss topical issues. Sergey Sobyanin, Chief of the Presidential Administration, headed the Council, and two Presidential Administration officials (Mikhail Ostrovskiy and Aleksandr Kudryavtsev) were Council members.

The 1997 Law ostensibly targets so-called totalitarian sects or dangerous religious cults, by making it difficult for members of less well-established religions to set up religious organizations. Many officials in law enforcement and the legislative branches spoke of protecting the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include Protestant and newer religious movements. The 1997 Law is very complex, with many ambiguous provisions, creating various categories of religious communities with different levels of legal status and privileges. Most significantly, the law distinguishes between religious "groups" and "organizations." A religious "group" is not registered and consequently does not have the legal status of a juridical person; it may not open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons and state†owned hospitals and among the armed forces. However, individual members of a group may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In this way, authorities theoretically permitted groups to rent public spaces and hold services; however, in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encountered significant difficulty in doing so.

The 1997 Law provides that a group that has existed for fifteen years and has at least ten citizen members may register as a "local organization." It acquires the status of a juridical person and receives certain legal advantages. A group with three functioning local organizations in different regions may found a "centralized organization," which has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without meeting the fifteen-year-rule requirement.

The 1997 Law required all religious organizations registered under a more liberal 1990 law to reregister by December 31, 2000. In practice, this process, which involved simultaneous registration at the federal and local levels, required considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded domestic religious organizations began to reregister soon after publication of the 1997 regulations; however, some Pentecostal congregations refused to register out of religious

conviction, and some Muslim groups decided that they would not benefit from reregistering, according to spokespersons for the two most prominent muftis.

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities, and they are barred from conducting services and other religious activities unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices opened without registering or were accredited to a registered religious organization.

Under a 1999 amendment to the 1997 Law, groups that failed to reregister became subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), i.e., deprivation of juridical status. By the deadline for reregistration, the MOJ held an estimated 2,095 religious groups subject to dissolution and dissolved approximately 980 by May 2002, asserting they were defunct, but religious minorities and NGOs contended that a significant number were active. Complaints of involuntary dissolution have decreased in recent years in part because those who fought dissolution have already taken their cases to court; however, a few groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvation Army, the Unification Church and Scientologists, were still fighting their cases through the court system.

The 1997 Law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups. Unlike dissolution, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits all of the activities of a religious community. Authorities have not used the law to ban many groups to date. However, in a notable exception, the decision of a Moscow court judge in June 2004 to uphold on appeal the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses garnered significant media coverage and prompted an upswing in restrictions on Jehovah's Witnesses. As of April 2006, authorities permitted registration of Jehovah's Witnesses groups in 400 local communities 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.

A lack of specific guidelines accompanying the 1997 Law contributed to inconsistent application at the local and regional levels. Local officials, reportedly often influenced either by close relations with local ROC authorities or the FSB, sometimes refused outright to register groups or created prohibitive obstacles to registration. There were indications that the Procurator General encouraged local prosecutors to challenge the registration of some minority religious groups.

The LDS Church succeeded in registering fifty-one local religious organizations as of the end of the reporting period. In 2005 authorities registered the LDS Church in Tver following a series of rejections of its application for registration. The group has not been able to register a local religious organization in Kazan, Tatarstan, since 1998 despite numerous attempts. In April 2006 the Federal Registration Service, part of the MOJ, restored the Salvation Army's registration documentation for the country-wide central religious organization. The legal position of its Moscow branch remained unresolved. Although the Constitutional Court found earlier rulings by Moscow courts dissolving the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army to be unconstitutional, the Moscow Oblast Department of Justice had not reregistered the organization by the end of the reporting period, and two of the court judgments that legally dissolved the applicant branch remained in force, despite the ruling of the Constitutional Court.

In a separate case, authorities had not enforced the Presnenskiy District Court ruling against the Salvation Army's registration, and according to the organization's Moscow office, it continued to operate based on documents filed under the old statute. The preface of the Presnenskiy Court's ruling refers to the Salvation Army as a "militarized organization." A textbook on religious culture prepared for use in schools repeats this definition of the Salvation Army, which it calls a "sect." The Slavic Center for Law and Justice (SCLJ) was working with the Moscow office of the Salvation Army to overturn the Presnenskiy Court ruling. The European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in June 2004 that the group's complaint that Moscow authorities had not allowed it to reregister was admissible; however, the court declared the rest of the complaints inadmissible. At the end of the reporting period, an ECHR decision on the merits was pending; however, the Salvation Army had not reported obstruction of its daily activities in Moscow.

Moscow authorities continued to deny reregistration to the Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology, threatening it with dissolution. The Scientologists countered the MOJ contention that the church had failed to reregister by the deadline by citing the 2002 Constitutional Court ruling in favor of the Salvation Army. Despite the court ruling against dissolution, the Government filed a supervisory appeal to the Supreme Court, which granted it, and remanded the case back to the trial court for new proceedings, in which the trial court ruled in the Government's favor. In February 2005, a Moscow appeals court ordered Moscow Oblast officials to permit the

Church to submit an application for reregistration and to examine the application on its merits. Prior to this decision, the Church of Scientology had filed a suit with the ECHR against the dissolution order, which the ECHR found admissible in October 2004. The case was still pending in the ECHR. By June 2006 the Church had filed for reregistration eleven times; the Moscow registration service rejected the tenth claim on June 27, 2005.

According to the Church of Scientology, other than the reregistration case the Church has had no substantive problems with other government agencies in the country in general, such as the tax authorities, prosecutor's office, or police. They had good relations with the authorities, especially regarding the Church's Human Rights Campaign and Youth for Human Rights Campaign. Authorities regularly issued permits without problem for Church-sponsored human rights events and anti-drug events, which have the support of various agencies. Under the Church of Scientology umbrella there were approximately 100 registered groups promoting the Church's ideas and projects throughout the country.

In response to local authorities' repeated refusal to register the St. Petersburg branch of the Church of Scientology, the Church filed suit. The St. Petersburg registration service claimed that the document from the St. Petersburg District Authorities certifying that the Church of Scientology has existed in St. Petersburg for fifteen years was not "authentic," although it did not give a reason for its finding. Authorities postponed a hearing scheduled for May 2005 for procedural reasons until June 2005; due to the illness of the presiding judge, authorities postponed the June 2005 hearing indefinitely, and at the end of the reporting period no hearing date had been set.

Local authorities have impeded the operation of Scientology centers in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Since these centers have not existed for fifteen years, they were unable to register 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 against the refusal of officials to register the churches based on the fifteen-year rule. The ECHR found the suits admissible in June 2005; the cases were awaiting a final decision.

The Council of Muftis indicated that registration was not an issue for Muslim organizations, and some regional Muslim organizations continued to operate without registration, such as the thirty-nine of forty-seven Muslim communities in the Stavropol region that operated without registration despite affiliation with a recognized regional Muslim administration. How many were unregistered by choice was unknown, but many Muslim organizations in the North Caucasus preferred not to be considered an official entity. The regions of Kabardino-Balkariya and Dagestan have local laws banning extremist religious activities, described as "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups. The government in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the strongest Islamic areas, continued to encourage a Tatar cultural and religious revival while avoiding instituting confrontational religious policies.

The Unification Church reported that the requirements of a broad range of government agencies, involving fire inspection, tax inspection, and epidemiological inspection unduly complicated the registration process.

A 2002 "Law on Foreigners," which transferred much of the responsibility for visa affairs from the MFA to the MVD, appeared to disrupt the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers. Immediately after implementation of this law, nontraditional groups reported problems receiving long-term visas. Although the number of such problems appeared to decrease during the previous reporting period, such reports continued, most notably with the recent ousters of the principal legal advisor for the Unification Church in January 2006 and a fellow worker in the Urals in February 2006. The former had lived in Moscow since 1990. As in the latter case, the FSB inserts itself into matters dealing with visas and religion, particularly with groups it labels "dangerous cults and sects," distinctions that it reserves for some of these nontraditional groups.

Working groups within the Government continued to focus on introducing possible amendments to the controversial 1997 Law but had not introduced any by the end of the reporting period. Duma Deputy Aleksandr Chuyev was one of several officials who proposed legislative changes to formally grant special status to "traditional" religious denominations.

According to Federal Registration Service statistics, authorities investigated the activities of 3,526 religious organizations during the 2005 calendar year. The MOJ sent notifications of various violations to 2,996 religious organizations. The courts made decisions on liquidating fifty-nine local organizations for violations of constitutional norms and federal legislation during that period. The courts made no deci-

sions on banning religious organizations. In July 2004 the MOJ had reported that authorities had returned more than 4,000 churches and other property and more than 15,000 religious items to the ROC. No update on the latter was available.

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 a body known as 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. Under the President, there is also a Council for the Promotion of Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights.

Avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities also exist. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential Representatives (Polpreds) include sub-offices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations; it is at these administrative levels that religious minorities often encounter the greatest problems.

The Russian Academy of State Service works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, to train regional and municipal officials 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.

Representatives of some minority religions and many expert observers claimed that some government officials, particularly in the security services, believed minority religions—especially Muslims, Roman Catholics, some Protestant denominations, and other groups—were security threats, requiring greater monitoring and possibly greater control.

In 2004 Smolensk and Kursk Oblast authorities adopted local laws restricting missionary activity. Under these laws, foreigners visiting the region are forbidden to engage in missionary activity or to preach unless specifically allowed to do so according to their visas. There were no reports of enforcement.

Contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, allowed regional officials to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Many observers attributed discriminatory practices at the local level to the greater susceptibility of local governments than the federal government to the influence of local majority religious groups. There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in publicly discussing their religious views, but usually authorities resolved these instances quickly. Although President Putin's expressed desire for greater centralization of power and strengthening of the rule of law initially led to some improvements in religious freedom in the regions, as local laws were brought into conformity with federal laws, many localities appeared to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the federal government chooses to intervene, it works through the Procuracy, MOJ, Presidential Administration, and the courts, forcing regions to comply with federal law or not, depending on the political stakes, as with the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses and Salvation Army cases. The Government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

During the reporting period, President Putin spoke out several times on the need to combat interethnic and interreligious intolerance, notably during the September 2005 UN General Assembly and during a February 2006 session of the Interior Ministry Council. He publicly condemned the January 2006 attack on a Moscow synagogue.

Officials met regularly during the reporting period with Rabbi Berl Lazar. In a January 2006 meeting, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the MFA was trying to fine-tune international dialogue dealing with the issues of how xenophobia and extremism can be countered at the international level. Lavrov also spoke out strongly against the January 2006 Moscow synagogue attack, stating that the root causes of xenophobia and anti-Semitism are deeper than law-enforcement agencies can cope with and that better education by the government religious groups, and public organizations could helpμaddress the problem. In a March 2005 meeting, President Putin pledged to make the fight against anti-Semitism a Government pri-

ority, and in an October 2004 meeting, he expressed support for the revival of Jewish communities. He also denounced anti-Semitism in several press interviews, usually to foreign media or while traveling outside the country. In April 2005 Rabbi Lazar met with Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov to discuss anti-Semitism and the state of Moscow's Jewish community. Luzhkov expressed concern about the growing number of extremist organizations and pledged the city's cooperation in fighting extremism. In April 2005, President Putin became the first Russian leader ever to visit Israel.

In March 2004, prominent rabbis Berl Lazar and Pinchas Goldschmidt came together to call on the Government to better define the meaning of "extremism." Lazar and Goldschmidt said that law enforcers were prone to dismiss anti-Semitic actions as simple hooliganism to avoid calling attention to their region as extremist-oriented and/or to consciously protect extremist groups with which they sympathized.

During the reporting period, new, more rigorous amendments to the existing Law on Countering Extremist Activity were working their way through the Federal Assembly, continuing the initiative begun by the March 2004 call by then Minister for Nationalities Vladimir Zorin, who called anti-Semitism and xenophobia major threats to the country, requiring stricter enforcement of the existing statutes outlawing extremism, such as Article 282 of the Criminal Code (which criminalizes the incitement of ethnic hatred). He also called for more programs to educate the public about anti-Semitism and to promote tolerance. Minister of Internal Affairs Rashid Nurgaliyev became the first high-level government official to acknowledge the existence of right-wing extremist youth groups. Combating this extremism was one of the top priority tasks for the MVD and FSB, he stated. These statements marked a positive step toward the Government's willingness to prosecute those who commit hate crimes, although few concrete moves have been made to solve many high-profile cases.

The Government does not require religious instruction in schools, but it continues to allow public usage of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. The Government has backed off from a controversial proposal to introduce an optional course on the national level, "Foundations of Orthodox Culture," using a textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, with descriptions of some minority religions that members of those religions found objectionable. Although some schools still used the text, the Ministry of Education rejected further editions and circulation. Nevertheless, a significant number of regions continued to offer in public schools a course on Orthodoxy and may continue to do so because municipal administrations make school curriculum decisions. On the federal level, the Governmental Commission for the Affairs of Religious Associations at its December 21, 2005, session chaired by Minister of Culture Sokolov, supported, among other issues, the proposal of the Ministry of Culture to grant religious educational institutions the right to train public school teachers of religion. The proposal to teach "world religions" or a course on Orthodoxy in the schools remained controversial among experts, including those in the ROC. Nevertheless, the ROC in some communities (Kaluga Oblast and Yekaterinburg) was training local teachers in summer courses providing teachers with certification to teach "Foundations of Orthodox Culture." Some regions have begun offering a class on "History of Religion," a proposal that Education Minister Andrey Fursenko suggested but had not introduced nationally.

In July 2005 the subscriber services of satellite broadcasters NTV-Plus and Stream TV launched Spas (Savior) television channel, the first one in the country devoted to religion. It devotes 40 percent of its sixteen daily broadcasting hours to Russian Orthodox themes, with the rest of the time for general interest talk shows, documentaries, and educational programming. An advisory board including members of the parliament and senior figures from the Orthodox Church sets the channel's agenda and decides on programming strategies.

The constitution mandates the availability of alternative military service to those who refuse to bear arms for religious or other reasons of conscience. The law on alternative civil service took effect in January 2004, and two supplements to the law were issued in March 2004. The first supplement listed 722 organizations to which authorities may assign draftees for alternative service, and the second listed 283 activities that qualified. In June 2004 Prime Minister Fradkov signed regulations on the implementation of the law on alternative civilian service. According to the regulations, the standard alternative service term is forty-two months—versus the regular service term of twenty-four months—but the term is shorter, thirty-six months, if the draftee is assigned to a military organization. The required service for university graduates is twenty-one and eighteen months, respectively, in these situations. 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.

The authorities permit Orthodox chapels and priests on army bases and also give Protestant groups access to military facilities, although on a limited basis. Authorities largely ban Islamic services in the military and generally do not give Muslim conscripts time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Some Muslim recruits serving in the army have reported that their fellow servicemen insulted and abused them on the basis of their religion.

In June 2004 authorities closed the federally targeted program on tolerance and anti-extremism ahead of its original 2005 end date. The program called for a large number of interagency measures, such as the review of federal and regional legislation on extremism, mandatory training for public officials to promote ethnic and religious tolerance, and new materials for use in public educational institutions.

With the registration of the Diocese of the Transfiguration in Novosibirsk in August 2005, the Roman Catholic Church completed the process of registration of the four existing Catholic dioceses (Moscow, Saratov, Irkutsk, and Novosibirsk). In 2003 President Putin stated publicly that secular authorities would do everything in their power to improve relations between the ROC and the Vatican.

Officials have encouraged a revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia with state subsidies for building Buddhist temples and training monks. The Government issued the Dalai Lama a visa, reversing previous denials of his visa requests.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Critics continue to identify several aspects of the 1997 Law on the grounds that it provided a legal basis for actions restricting religious freedom. In particular, they criticized the provisions requiring organizations to reregister, establishing procedures for their dissolution, and allowing the Government to ban religious organizations. Critics also cited provisions that not only limit the rights of religious "groups" but also require that religious groups exist for fifteen years before they can qualify for "organization" status. Although the situation was somewhat better for groups that were registered before 1997, new groups were sometimes hindered in their ability to practice their faith. The federal government has attempted to apply the 1997 Law in a liberal fashion, and critics directed most of their allegations of restrictive practices at local officials. Implementation of the 1997 Law varied widely, depending on the attitude of local offices of the MOJ (responsible for registration, dissolution, and bans).

In February 2004 the Procuracy of Moscow's Northern Circuit banned the local organization of Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that it was a "threat to society," a basis for banning under the 1997 Law. Unlike dissolution, which involves only the loss of juridical status, a ban prohibits all of the activities of a religious community. In June 2004 a ban on all organized activity by Moscow's 10,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses took effect, marking one of the first times that such a ban had been implemented under the 1997 Law. Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the ruling, and although the judge admitted that members did not incite violent religious hatred, he accused the organization of "forcing families to disintegrate, violating the equal rights of parents in the upbringing of their children, violating the constitution and freedom of conscience, encouraging suicide, and inciting citizens to refuse both military and alternative service." In May 2005 authorities advised the Witnesses by telephone that the Presidium of the Moscow City Court had dismissed a subsequent appeal, although by the end of the reporting period, authorities had not sent official documentation of the dismissal or an explanation of its grounds. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) was considering their appeal, which was submitted in 2004. The ban, although applying only to Moscow, has had nationwide ramifications for the 133,000 Jehovah's Witnesses practicing in the country.

After the 2004 Moscow banning decisions, many local congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country reported that landlords had cancelled rental contracts on their buildings or were threatening to do so. During the reporting period, the Witnesses reported a problem similar to their June 2004 attempts to find a suitably large venue in Sochi, when a landlord denied access to a meeting venue after FSB pressure but later reversed the denial. In Moscow Oblast, which is a separate jurisdiction from the city of Moscow, the Witnesses reported a hotel conference center, a cinema, and a cultural center, each of which previously had been used by congregations of Witnesses, cancelled their leases.

Some landlords outside of the city of Moscow appeared to believe that the Moscow ban obligated them to cancel rental contracts with the Witnesses, as seen by incidents in 2005 in Roshchino (Leningrad Oblast), Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Khabarovsk, and Ufa, where authorities disrupted or prevented assemblies. For example, in March 2005, reportedly under pressure from his superiors, the Director

of the Palace of Culture in the village of Roshchino forced a group of Witnesses to change the venue of a religious celebration scheduled in the palace.

In some cases the Witnesses reported that authorities consulted with the ROC to determine whether to approve their requests. The Witnesses report that Father Valeriy of the Arkhangelsk Orthodox Diocese exerted pressure on Archangelsk authorities to prevent the Witnesses from holding a district convention scheduled for August 2005 similar to the Church's influence in Vladimir in 2004, in which venue use depended on approval from a local Russian Orthodox priest.

In April 2005, the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk City Court dismissed the claim filed by the city prosecutor to declare invalid the registration of the local Witnesses' organization's title to the unfinished Kingdom Hall in that city. The Witnesses subsequently finished construction of the building and were able to use it for religious services. In February 2006 an internet agency, Regions.Ru, claimed that a group affiliated with the Yekaterinburg ROC diocese asked the court to ban Jehovah's Witnesses, a "totalitarian cult," because of "their destructive activities." In August 2005 the regional internet agency, UralPolit.Ru, reported that the Yekaterinburg ROC diocese was taking the Jehovah's Witnesses to court, seeking a ban, as "what already happened to them in Moscow." Nevertheless, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Yekaterinburg continued their activities as usual.

In April 2006 the news agency Kurskcity.ru published an article referring to the Moscow ban as an example to be followed and claiming that authorities could ban the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kursk. The article added that the Kursk City Council would discuss Jehovah's Witnesses harassment of citizens.

The Witnesses won appeals to overturn dissolution orders that lower courts issued as in November 2004, in Primorskiy Kray, and in October 2004, in Tatarstan. Jehovah's Witnesses cited five child custody cases in which courts have reportedly discriminated against their religion and in which the banning played a role. A court in Primorskiy Kray cited the Moscow ban in reversing a lower court's decision to award custody of a child to its mother, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses. In August 2004 the judge in a child custody case reportedly wrote to the Moscow court that ordered the banning of the Witnesses to request a copy of its decision. In November 2004 the father in a child custody case referred to the Moscow banning decision as one of the factors supporting his claim for custody. Some cases were resolved in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses mother.

In May 2004 the Civil Law Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation upheld the decision of the Bashkortostan Supreme Court, which upheld in March 2004 a previous ruling against the local Church of Scientology Dianetics Center for conducting illegal medical and educational activities and of "harming people." Officials closed down the initial Ufa center, but the Scientologists formed a parallel Dianetics Center, which was operating openly; however, the negative publicity and the local prosecutor's ongoing investigation led to a semi-underground existence.

There was no progress in the investigation of the January 2004 explosion in a building belonging to a congregation of unregistered Baptists (also called "Initsiativniki") in Tula. Anonymous threats caused the Tula Baptist community to believe the explosion was a terrorist attack, while local law enforcement authorities attributed a gas leak, although a gas company inspection reported no evidence of a gas leak. The authorities have long been suspicious of the Initsiativniki, whose complete refusal to cooperate with the Soviet authorities led to their split in 1961 from the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

Some human rights groups and religious minorities accused the Procurator General of encouraging legal action against a number of minority religions and for giving official support to materials that are biased against Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, the LDS Church, and others. There were credible reports that supporters of the ROC 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 MOJ to reject registration applications.

Forum 18 reported that the FSB had summoned the leadership of an Old Believers' community in February 2004 to indicate the FSB's preference for a particular candidate for church leadership who lost the election. There were no reports of further FSB contact with the group.

Some religious personnel experienced visa and customs difficulties while entering or leaving the country, although such problems appeared to be decreasing for some groups. Authorities either deported or denied entry to several religious workers with valid visas during the period covered by this report, such as the January 9, 2006, deportation of the founder and legal/spiritual advisor of the Unification Church in Moscow, who may not reapply for a visa for five years, despite having lived in the

country since 1990. During the previous reporting period, the Forum 18 news service reported that there were fifty-five cases of foreign religious workers of various religious groups who had been barred since 1998.

In March 2005 the Government denied entry to high-ranking British and Danish Salvation Army officials, Major Robert Garrard and Colonel Karl Lydholm, respectively, who sought to attend a church congress. In explaining its decision to deny entry, the Moscow city branch of the federal MVD cited the provision of law under which foreigners may be denied entry "in the interests of state security."

Visa problems appeared to decrease for some groups during the reporting period. Several groups, including the LDS and Roman Catholic churches, reported that the FSB issued most of their clergy one-year visas. Foreign religious workers without residency permits typically must go abroad once a year to renew their visas, usually back to their countries of origin; some receive multiple-entry visas or are able to extend their stays. Since the enactment of the Law on Foreigners and subsequent amendments that took effect in 2002, some religious workers reported difficulty in obtaining visas with terms longer than three months (even if they had previously held visas with one-year validity). The curtailed validity has led some religious groups to begin shuttling their missionaries in and out of the country every three months, presenting a financial and spiritual hardship for such groups. Missionaries under such restrictions must pay for travel back to their countries of origin, often not knowing if they may return. As a result, many missionary groups must find and maintain two workers for every position if one is to be available for ministry while the other is outside the country applying for a visa renewal.

Foreign clergy are particularly important for the Roman Catholic Church in the country, since there are only a relatively small number of ordained Russian nationals, primarily because the Soviets only allowed two Catholic parishes and no seminaries to function in Soviet times. The first local citizens that the church trained as Catholic priests since the end of the Soviet regime graduated in 1999. At the end of the reporting period, there were approximately 270 Catholic priests working in the country, with only 10 percent of them citizens, and approximately 220 officially registered Catholic parishes.

One of the eight Catholic clergy the Government barred since 1998, Polish Catholic priest Father Janusz Blaut, to whom authorities refused a visa in October 2004 after he worked in North Ossetia for ten years, returned to the republic's capital Vladikavkaz in autumn 2005. Foreign Catholic clergy in the Krasnodar region now hold one-year visas rather than three-month visas that authorities issued from mid-2002 to mid-2004. Another priest denied entry, Polish citizen Father Edward Mackiewicz, in effect, exchanged his Rostov-on-Don parish with that of Father Michal Nickowski in western Ukraine, who, as a Ukrainian citizen, may remain in the country without a visa for up to three months. Officials granted Father Jerzy Steckiewicz, leader of the parish in Kaliningrad, a tourist visa valid only for that region, rather than a religious visa, making it impossible for him to travel in the rest of the country. Otherwise, Catholic authorities reported a decrease in visa problems for priests during the period covered by this report.

Officials annulled the visa of Moscow chief rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt in September 2005, denied a visa to South African Protestant church overseer Hugo Van Niekerk in July 2005, and revoked the visa of German Lutheran bishop Siegfried Springer in April 2005. All subsequently received visas and returned.

As was the case for the previous reporting year, the LDS Church reported few visa problems for their foreign missionaries and that virtually all of them received one-year, multiple-entry visas. The LDS Church occasionally had difficulties in securing residency permits for missionaries but noted this varied from region to region and was not systemic. There were few reports of religious workers of minority religious groups having difficulties registering their visas with the local authorities, as required by law.

In December 2003 the Unification Church reported that it appealed to the ECHR the Government's 2002 denial of a visa to church member Patrick Nolan. This case has not yet been ruled on. In 2003, Nolan lost both a trial court case and an appeal before the Supreme Court. Missionaries with the Swedish Evangelical Church in Krasnodar, the OMS Christian organization, the Christian Church in Kostroma, and the Kostroma "Family of God" Pentecostal Church, to whom officials denied visas in past years, did not return. In some cases, officials denied visa renewals for those living there for up to nine years.

While most conscripts seeking exemptions from military service sought medical or student exemptions, the courts provided relief to some on the grounds of religious conviction. The question of conscientious objector status arose most frequently with respect to Jehovah's Witnesses, under the new legal regime which took effect in spring 2004 governing alternative civilian service (ACS). In February 2006 officials

from the Federal Services for Labor and Employment and the Department for the Organization and Control of Alternative Civilian Service in Moscow reported that approximately 640 individuals were performing ACS, 70 percent of whom were Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses were aware of 192 Jehovah's Witnesses performing ACS. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported that draft commissioners more willingly appointed them to ACS than in the past, and they did not face the same pressure to unwillingly perform military service as they did previously. Since ACS formation, 197 Witnesses have refused it; there were 37 ongoing cases against Witnesses for avoidance of ACS, and the courts convicted 41 Witnesses of evasion, and either fined them (between 100 dollars and 1,000 dollars or approximately 2,700 rubles and 27,000 rubles, respectively) or sentenced them to perform community service (up to 210 hours). Jehovah's Witnesses were aware of only two criminal cases that authorities had instigated against Witnesses for evasion of military service. At the end of this reporting period, authorities had imprisoned no Witnesses for failure to perform ACS.

In Bashkortostan, the Supreme Court sustained the refusal of exemption for Jehovah's Witness Marsel Faizov due to his criminal background. The ECHR accepted this case in March 2006. The Government filed its observations on June 27, 2006. Faizov had until September 1, 2006, to provide his reply to the Government's observations. However, to Jehovah's Witnesses' knowledge the Supreme Court of Bashkortostan had not reconsidered the case, and it was not clear when it would do so.

Some religious groups reported problems with religious properties. In March 2005 a St. Petersburg court dismissed the Witnesses' suit in litigation since 1999 seeking permission to remodel a building it owned on Pogranichnika Gar'kavogo Street for use as a prayer center. As of the end of the reporting period, the Witnesses reported that they were selling the property and had opened another meeting place.

Although in 2004 authorities in Velikiy Novgorod held a meeting favorable in its public response to Jehovah's Witnesses' request to acquire land to construct a lecture hall, the city denied permission, informing them in April 2005 that the city would not review the denial. During the reporting period, the local authorities continued to dismiss the congregation's repeated requests for information on available plots of land.

Following a March 2004 referendum in Sosnovyy Bor (Leningrad Oblast), local authorities refused to let a Jehovah's Witnesses community use land to construct a place of worship. At the end of the reporting period, the congregation had not been able to obtain permission from the authorities to build a place of worship and was using a privately owned building to hold their meetings. On May 5, 2006, Mayskaya Gorka City Circuit in the Arkhangelsk region held a public meeting to discuss a Jehovah's Witness application for a plot of land to build a place of worship. A large crowd gathered for the hearing, including members of political groups and three local ROC priests. Reports indicate that the atmosphere was hostile, not giving the representatives of the Witnesses the opportunity to reply to all the questions, the majority of which were about religious beliefs rather than plans for the land. The mob chanted "Down with the sect," among other verbal abuses. ROC representatives reportedly made allegations that Jehovah's Witnesses are forbidden to speak to their non-Witness relatives and called it a sect that one cannot leave voluntarily and that destroys families. At the conclusion of the meeting, those present voted not to provide Jehovah's Witnesses with a plot of land.

The Jehovah's Witnesses successful attempt to build a Kingdom Hall in Zlatoust in the Chelyabinsk region is an example of federal authorities intervening at the local level through the court system. The local administration provided the Jehovah's Witnesses with a plot of land, but when construction began in June 2005, local residents filed complaints with the authorities, and the prosecutor initiated an administrative case against the Jehovah's Witnesses. Over the next four months, local city officials claimed the building was unlawful since the Witnesses did not adequately inform the public of their intentions, and there was no expert environmental study of the site. Local authorities felt the Jehovah's Witnesses should destroy the building at their own expense. Although the Zlatoust prosecutor served the Jehovah's Witnesses with a warning to cease infringement of the 1997 Law, the Chelyabinsk Regional Arbitration Court decided in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In January 2006 the Chelyabinsk Region Department of State Environmental Control produced a site impact conclusion unsupportive of the Jehovah's Witnesses, prompting them to request a second ecological expert study. In February 2006 the Chelyabinsk Region Directorate of the Federal Service for Control of Nature Management's expert ecological study supported the construction project. Following this change, the arbitration court continued hearing the case. The city administration argued that the Kingdom Hall in Zlatoust should be declared illegal and destroyed

and produced a letter from the Chelyabinsk Region Federal Registration Service (FRS) stating that the Jehovah's Witnesses had violated the 1997 Law. The court dismissed the motion as well as the city administration's application to demand demolition at the expense of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The city administration did not appeal the decision.

There was no change in the situation during the reporting period for the LDS Church, whose leaders confirmed press reports that in August 2004 a local Cossack group organized a protest against plans for the construction of a meetinghouse in Saratov city. Muslim and ROC leaders also spoke out against the construction. Although the church had received construction permits for the project, the city stopped construction, and did not permit it to resume.

According to a May 2005 article in the Perm newspaper Permskiy Obozrevatel, in late 2004 the Pentecostal New Testament Church in Perm purchased the local House of Culture from a private company to house its social and charitable activities. The purchase provoked considerable controversy in the area, reportedly encouraged in part by the local ROC Bishop Irinarkh, a long-time critic of Pentecostals. The case went to an arbitration court, which ultimately recognized the sale as legal and valid but did not issue a ruling that would bind the owner to proceed with the registration. The Pentecostals paid 50 million rubles ($1,851,851) for the House of Culture and were using it for their services, but they were not registered as the owners at the end of the reporting period. According to Pastor Eduard Grabovenko, oblast administration officials had put pressure on the owner to block registration. On May 11, 2006, the New Testament Church filed a suit asking the court to issue an order that would permit property rights registration without the former owner's cooperation.

In late May 2006 a meeting between Perm Governor Oleg Chirkunov and the chairman of the Russian Pentecostal Union Sergey Ryakhovskiy brought no results. However, according to a representative of the Russian Pentecostal Union, the problem of the building was later resolved successfully. In April 2006 the Arbitration Court ruled in favor of the Pentecostal community and ordered the selling party to complete the building sale; however, the Perm Kray Committee on Culture appealed, creating at least a month's postponement of the final decision. As a result of an appeal by some local organizations to return the House of Culture to the administration in exchange for another building, the Pentecostal community agreed, and the problem became one of finding an appropriate new building for them.

In May 2006 the Moscow Arbitration Court decided in favor of the Charismatic Kingdom of God Church, in a suit that the Federal Property Agency filed in December 2005 asking the court to obtain on demand its "illegally occupied" property in the capital. According to the suit, the privatized factory, which sold its former social center and sports hall to the church in December 1997, had no right to do so "since the owner of the building...is the Russian Federation." In its decision the court said that the Government had no ownership rights over the property, that the church possessed a valid state certificate registering its rights to the property, and that the deadline for legal challenges—three years from the point of sale—had in any case long expired.

Contrary to previous reports, the Voronezh Lutheran Community reported it had been discussing with local ROC representatives the return of their church building, although it was expected that this process would take considerable time to complete.

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 April 2005 the court ordered the Church of St. Olga in Zheleznovodsk, which the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) first registered in 1944 at the same address, transferred to the authority of the ROC Diocese of Stavropol despite the ROAC congregation's renovation and reconstruction of the building at the same site. Cossacks implemented the decision in April 2006, which forced the ROAC to conduct its Easter service outside while the church building stood empty of parishioners, since the local community belongs to the ROAC, not the ROC. The protesting of the church transfer and informing the international community led to the beating of Metropolitan Valentine (see the Abuse section) as well as threats to the ROAC clergy.

On June 2, 2006, media and Hare Krishna representatives reported that Moscow City authorities approved the allotment of land for the construction of a Krishna temple. Reports indicated that the promise was part of a joint statement by the Mayor of Moscow and the Delhi Chief Minister, who hoped to enhance trade and economic cooperation. Moscow's estimated 10,000 Hare Krishna devotees shared their temple with at least 5,000 Indians, Sri Lankans, Nepalese, and Mauritians of other Hindu denominations. This followed the Moscow authorities' sudden October 7, 2005, withdrawal of permission for the new temple's construction. The Hare

Krishna community was left, until the recent accord between the two city governments, using temporary accommodation on the construction site. Having spent more than $74, 074 (two million rubles) on the project and approved an architectural design with considerable difficulty due to its distinctiveness from the surrounding buildings on Leningradskiy Prospekt, the Hare Krishna devotees subsequently turned to Moscow's Arbitration Court. The status of the appeal remained unclear in light of the accord, but while their appeal was being heard, the community cannot be evicted from the site, even though Moscow's land committee ordered it to leave in January 2006. In withdrawing their permission, the city authorities cited paperwork errors involving the terms of land usage.

Already demolished as part of a municipal building program, the Hare Krishna community's previous Moscow temple premises were a gift in 1989 as part of the confession's rehabilitation in the late Soviet period. (In the early 1980s the Soviets incarcerated approximately fifty of its members in prisons and psychiatric institutions.) Authorities offered the current site as compensation for the demolition of the previous temple. They have permission to remain on their current site until ready to move to the new location. The question of architecture remained a concern at any site. On November 30, 2005, Interfax reported that Russian Orthodox Archbishop Nikon (Vasyukov) of Ufa and Sterlitamak asked Mayor Luzhkov not to allow the construction of the temple and used disrespectful language about the Hindu religion.

Rinchenling, a 200-strong community following the Dzogchen tradition within Tibetan Buddhism, lost its Moscow city center premises in 2004 due to a municipal construction project. Unlike the Hare Krishna community, city authorities did not offer them compensation, as there was no provision for it in their 1997 rental contract. In January 2005 Rinchenling also closed its Kunsangar retreat center in Moscow region. The group's Tibetan teacher, Chogyal Namkai Norbu, had told the group to sell the retreat center due to the negative influence of local Orthodox. Rinchenling was planning to set up a retreat center in Ukraine.

The Unification Church reported difficulties in establishing a Eurasian Church Center in Moscow to coordinate church activities in the region. On June 19, 2006, ORT–TV aired a sensational television program, The Order of Moon: A Special Investigative Report, where the Government appeared to be laying the groundwork for actions against the Church. This follows security services' actions against the founder of the Moscow congregation and legal and spiritual advisor, a U.S. citizen living in Moscow since 1990. On December 31, 2005, the main immigration office summoned him and gave him ten days to leave the country, banning his reapplication for five years. The FSB reportedly sent eight men to watch him during the remaining time, preventing him taking the actions necessary to remain in the country and escorting him onto the plane on January 9, 2006. The Church planned to construct the center on property owned by an NGO affiliated with the Reverend Moon. In April 2005 a local prosecutor ordered church officials to turn over for inspection documents relating to the property after the local administration received complaints from local citizens that a "totalitarian sect" was using the building. Eight police officers reportedly visited the property the next day in order to "investigate criminal activity."

According to Forum 18, in January 2006 the Evangelical Christian Missionary Union, which embraces fifty-four registered churches throughout the southern part of the country, reported that the municipal authorities in the town of Tikhoretsk (Krasnodar Kray) had refused to renew a rental contract with its congregation there. The 150-strong Path to God Church had rented its basement premises for the previous seven years and renovated them, according to the Union, but was unable to find alternative premises in the town and thus to meet as a single congregation.

Protestants in Voronezh and elsewhere often suspected local Orthodox clergy to be instrumental in blocking their construction plans. They cited as an example Saratov's construction committee's refusal to grant the Word of Life Pentecostal Church permission to advertise its presence on the outside wall of its own premises. In a letter dated May 4, 2005, chief architect Vladimir Virich confirmed as much, referring to an April 19, 2005, letter from the Saratov diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church and indicating that the Architectural Committee could not agree to the sign because of the letter.

State authorities gave Muslims meeting at Mosque Number 34 on the outskirts of Astrakhan until May 1, 2006, the option to demolish their worship building themselves or face its destruction, after the Astrakhan Oblast Court denied an April 17, 2006, appeal to suspend the demolition of the mosque for three months. At the end of the reporting period, the mosque remained standing. The congregation had already lost a previous March 1 Astrakhan Oblast Court appeal against a January 23, 2006, decision in which Astrakhan's Soviet District Court agreed with the municipal administration that authorities should remove the mosque—a disused silage

tower and two-storey annex on the road to the city's airport—as it qualified as "unauthorized construction."

The mosque congregation purchased the 6,450 square-foot site in 1998, and Astrakhan authorities gave them permission to carry out the preliminary construction work of a new mosque building during the first half of 2001. However, the court noted that they did not start until almost four years later, and that the Muslim community's refurbishment and extension of the disused silage tower was not on the construction plan the city's architectural department approved. The court also ruled that they must remove the currently existing construction work for the new mosque, begun in 2005 after the community had collected sufficient funds.

Muslim sources were skeptical about the reasons given for the demolition order. Their situation abruptly changed, they claim, following a visit by President Putin to Astrakhan in August 2005, when he reportedly remarked to the regional governor and mayor that they had not chosen a good place for a mosque. When authorities denied them permission to hold a February 20 demonstration outside Astrakhan's municipal administration building, Muslim activists gathered morse than 1,000 signatures protesting the demolition order. They intended to appeal to the supreme court, although it was not heard before the May 1 deadline. Per the Sova Center, a human rights NGO, the court ruling to demolish the mosque had not been executed as of June 30, 2006.

Citizens in Kaliningrad protested against the construction of a mosque, which the local Muslim community had been requesting since 1993. The ROC was involved in the talks to allow construction. While he claimed not to be against the mosque's construction, the local ROC bishop insisted that a small mosque rather than a large Muslim cultural center should be built in the suburbs, proportional to the small number of Muslims living in Kaliningrad. The Sova Center reported that as of August 17, 2005, the Commission on Economic Policy and Municipal Property of the Kaliningrad City Council allowed the Kaliningrad Muslim organization to use several buildings free of charge. The Muslims planned to open a mosque there.

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 authorities had not met the request for a land spot for a mosque, but the negotiations were continuing.

The mayor's office continued to deny authorization to Muslims in the Krasnodar Kray to build a new mosque in the city of Sochi, even though the organization's current rented premises barely accommodated the approximately thirty members who attended Friday prayers. According to Sova, officials allotted land several times but did not authorize construction because of technical problems, or they ultimately sold the land to other people. According to the Krasnodar Kray Department for Relations with Public Associations and Religious Organizations and Monitoring of Migration Processes, authorities can allocate land for a mosque only after a public opinion survey indicates that the proposed location would not cause a "conflict situation."

Restitution of religious property seized by the Communist government remained an issue. Although authorities have returned many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, all four traditional religions continued to pursue restitution cases.

The ROC appeared to have had greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still had disputed property claims. The ROC had a number of restitution claims in Yekaterinburg. According to the ROC diocese spokesman, the ROC does not lay claim to the 1905 Square but it would like to see the Orthodox cathedral that once stood there rebuilt. The issue was not discussed because the ROC understood how complicated and costly it would be to pull down the existing structures to make room for a cathedral.

Property claims are a complicated subject, according to the ROC spokesman, since there was no separation between church and state before the revolution. Most of the Orthodox church buildings in Sverdlovsk Oblast that were returned to the ROC were not considered ROC property; the ROC had no property rights to them and is only entitled to use these buildings, so that, at least theoretically, it could be evicted. The ROC fully owned only newly built churches.

In fact, the very historical importance of a building can impede its return to previous owners, as the Government views many prerevolutionary buildings as cultural treasures and runs them as museums, such as the Kremlin cathedrals, St. Petersburg's Peter and Paul Cathedral, and most of Novgorod's medieval churches. Since

1995 the Ministry of Culture has determined which historical and cultural monuments religious organizations must share with the state.

The Moscow City Duma passed a law in March 2004 returning approximately $27,500 (approximately 742,500 rubles) to the ROC as retroactive property tax benefits.

Forum 18 reported that an Old Believer community in Samara was still struggling to obtain restitution of a prerevolutionary church. Municipal officials told the community that it should first ascertain the position of the ROC on restitution. In April 2006, for the first time in seventy-five years, the community celebrated Easter in the church, even though the municipality had not yet officially returned the church to the community.

The Roman Catholic Community reported forty-four disputed properties, most of which they would use for religious services. The Catholic Church was not successful in achieving restitution of the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. The office of an oil company occupied the cathedral, and the Catholic parish met in a former disco hall because it did not expect the company to vacate the premises. According to the Catholic Church, it was making progress towards building a new church in Moscow to replace the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral. In Vologda, Catholic authorities had not succeeded in—and did not anticipate—achieving restitution of a prerevolutionary church that housed a restaurant. In 2005 the local authorities in Tula returned a building to the local Catholic parish.

According to a March 2004 statement from the Council of Muslim Religious Organizations in Stavropol City, the region's arbitration court finally refused to hear a case set to decide the issue of whether or not federal authorities could require Stavropol authorities to return a mosque that had been converted to a city art gallery back to the Muslim community—after seven months of preliminary deliberations—on the grounds that it was "outside its competency." The fact that authorities lack of action forced the local Muslim community to file suit with the court in the first place, explains the statement, because the Stavropol Kray authorities repeatedly refused to acknowledge receipt of a 1999 instruction from the federal Ministries of Culture and State Property demanding the return of the former mosque to local Muslims.

Muslims in Beslan have appealed to the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations to return an historic mosque to the Muslim community. The Cathedral Mosque, built in 1906 by the decree of Tsar Nicholas II, was occupied by a vodka-bottling plant and a bottle washing shop, and was soon to be modified to accommodate a car wash. The North Ossetian administration alleged that there was nowhere to move the plant, but the republic's Muslim Council stated that locating a factory in a mosque was illegal and that there were several facilities in the town to accommodate the factory.

The Jewish community was still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The FJC 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 Russian Federation has returned only a small portion of the total properties the Soviets confiscated under Soviet rule. In December 2004 the mayor of Sochi gave the Jewish community a parcel of land on which to construct a synagogue and community center to replace the small structure in use. According to the chief rabbi of Sochi Arye Edelcopf, the community was collecting money for the construction of the synagogue which was to begin within a few months. Chabad Lubavitch still sought return of the Schneerson Collection, revered religious books and documents of the Lubavitcher rebbes.

Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities. In Arkhangelsk, Jehovah's Witnesses originally signed a contract to use premises, from August 5–7, 2005, belonging to the Rossiya Physical Education and Sports Trade Union Society for a large congress, but received notice from the society's director three days before the congress was to take place that the building would not be available due to an incomplete sewage system. Failing to win an arbitration court challenge to this unilateral cancellation of the contract, the Jehovah's Witnesses then signed two further contracts with smaller venues, but the director of one cancelled the agreement later the same day.

On August 3, 2005, two days before the Jehovah's Witnesses' congress, Arkhangelsk-based weekly newspaper Pravda Severo-Zapada ran an article detailing last year's court ban on the Moscow community of Jehovah's Witnesses and likening the organization to Aum Sinrikyo, the Japanese religious group convicted of releasing nerve gas into Tokyo's underground system in 1995. The newspaper labeled the ideology totalitarian and called for an investigation by the FSB.

When the Jehovah's Witnesses' congress commenced on August 5, 2005 at the third venue, the Solombala Arts Center, the police demanded that all 714 delegates leave the building because of an alleged terrorist threat. Subsequently, a fire inspector drew up an official order closing the building. As a result, the Witnesses reduced the three-day program to a partial one-day session held on August 5, 2005. Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with the prosecutor's office to open a criminal case against those responsible for the breakup of the convention; however, the prosecutor's office dismissed the complaint.

Officials also significantly disrupted two other Jehovah's Witnesses' regional congresses during the reporting period in the southern Urals city of Orenburg, where a conference was scheduled for August 12–14, 2005 and in Kokhma (Ivanovo region) for a July 22–24, 2005 congress in Rekord Stadium.

A Jehovah's Witnesses' convention planned for July 8–10, 2005 in Yekaterinburg with the participation of more than 5,000 Witnesses did not take place because of the reported July 4, 2005 intervention of an Orthodox priest who wrote a letter to the owner of the stadium demanding that the convention not proceed. On July 7 the director of the stadium claimed repair work should proceed instead and canceled the contract. Jehovah's Witnesses attempted to resolve the crisis by contacting officials, including filing a claim with the Yekaterinburg Prosecutor's Office to initiate a criminal case against the priest for disrupting the lawful activity of a religious organization. On August 31, Jehovah's Witnesses sent an inquiry on the results of the investigation to the prosecutor's office, which on September 14, 2005, replied that the investigation was still ongoing. Nevertheless, the Witnesses' Easter observances in Yekaterinburg on April 12, 2006, proceeded without official or community disruption for the first time in many years.

The Church of Scientology reported that it sometimes had difficulties getting permits for large events in Moscow.

The Caucasian Knot website reported in March 2006 that law enforcement officials in Kabardino-Balkaria continued to monitor children in schools who displayed observant Muslim customs, after the phrase "Jihad is freedom" appeared on the wall in a Nalchik school. Reportedly they kept lists of students who said Muslim prayers, had Muslim middle names, or who sent clips with Islamic themes through their mobile phones.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On October 13, 2005, following ROAC complaints about the awarding of St. Olga's Church to the ROC, three armed men broke into the home of Metropolitan Valentine of Suzdal and Vladimir, the head of the ROAC. The attack was obviously well planned and timed to take advantage of a short period when he was alone. The attackers knocked him unconscious and beat him severely, particularly on his feet, from which they removed the bandages to inflict more harm because of his diabetic condition. The men rolled him up in a rug to be carried out of the house, but the unexpected arrival of another cleric surprised the attackers and they dropped the Metropolitan. He spent six months in the hospital recovering from injuries sustained and the amputation of part of his foot. The FSB reportedly interrogated and threatened several ROAC clergy and members following this incident.

In April 2005, a group of masked paramilitary troops stormed the Work of Faith Church in Izhevsk, Udmurtia, during an evening worship service, led worshippers outside and searched them without a search warrant; the troops threatened some of the women with rape and detained forty-six persons some for as long as twenty four hours. In response to several complaints (and international attention), local authorities conducted an investigation of the Izhevsk incident. They said their investigation uncovered that the police had committed some procedural irregularities while the detainees were in custody, that officials had given a warning to the district police chief because of the irregularities, had reprimanded two other police officials, and opened a criminal investigation into the allegation that the police beat one of the detainees. Officials dropped administrative charges against most, if not all, of the detainees.

On the evening of April 12, 2006, the Lyublino Police Department of Moscow disrupted a religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses. The commemoration of the death of Christ, also known as the Lord's Evening Meal, is the most important religious observance for Jehovah's Witnesses. The chief of the Lyublino Police Department, Yevgeniy Kulikov, ordered the congregation to disperse. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, police detained fourteen male leaders of the congregation, taking their passports. Armed officers of the Special Police Forces (OMON) took them to the Lyublino police station where police interrogated them for up to four hours before releasing them at one-thirty a.m. Police refused to provide them with written reasons for their detention and reportedly not only physically assaulted their attorney when he went

to the police station to assist them but also threatened him at knife-point not to file a complaint. Both the police and Jehovah's Witnesses filed complaints with the prosecutor's office. The Jehovah's Witnesses also filed a court action, and officials set the hearing for May 2006. After several adjournments, on June 15, 2006, the judge finally ruled that the detention of the plaintiffs was unlawful, but dismissed the remainder of the claim, failing to find unlawful the fact that police had disrupted the religious service. The decision referred to the absence of the permission of the authorities to carry out the meeting, in accordance with the Federal Law on Assemblies, Rallies, Processions, Demonstrations, and Pickets. Jehovah's Witnesses filed an appeal on June 30 with the Moscow City Court because the law does not apply to religious groups or associations.

Of the 23 different locations in Moscow used by some 17,000 of Jehovah's Witnesses to commemorate the death of Christ, the Lyublino District was the only place where the observance was disrupted by police intervention. Similar services were held throughout the country without interference. In 2005 the total number who attended services was approximately 267,000.

In early April 2006 persons repeatedly vandalized the Kingdom Hall and its surrounding property in Kamyshin in the Volgograd region. Police did not take any action, saying that the acts did not constitute a crime. In November 2005, unidentified persons fired thirty shots into the Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall in Voskresensk, but hit no one. Police opened a criminal case but closed it on January 31, 2006, because they could not identify the perpetrators.

In August 2004, the Khabarovsk newspaper Amurskiy Meridian reported that in March of that year police in Khabarovsk detained and beat Sergey Sofrin, a local Jewish businessman, repeatedly insulting him with religious epithets. At the end of the reporting period, contacts at the newspaper reported that although officials conducted an investigation of the incident, they had not disciplined the police involved yet.

Authorities periodically arrested suspected members of the banned Islamic political movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), on the grounds that they conducted extremist and terrorist activities. In April 2006 a Moscow court convicted Sardorbek Siddikov and sentenced him to one year in jail for membership in HT. On September 8, 2005, the city court of Nizhnevartovsk, gave a four-year suspended prison term to Eduard Khusainov, who was believed to have headed the local HT group. Officials reportedly found extremist propaganda in his apartment. Khusainov was charged with organizing the activities of an extremist organization and with "involving others in committing terrorist crimes or otherwise abetting such crimes."

On October 3, 2005, the Tobolsk Court found nine members of the local HT branch guilty on all charges of extremism brought against them. Three of the accused—local leaders Marat Saybatalov, Dmitriy Petrichenko, and Rail Valitov—were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five and one-half to six years. Other members were sentenced to various terms from twelve months to five and one-half years.

According to Sova, police broke up an HT group in Chelyabinsk in March 2005 and detained one of its members, Rinat Galiullin. The criminal case against Rinat Galiullin was initiated on March 15, 2005. He was arrested and tried in September–November 2005. The court passed a verdict of a one-year suspended sentence. Also, Galiullin won a suit against a local newspaper for spreading information alleging that he had been plotting a riot, stockpiled weapons, and encouraged people to sign a contract with Al Qaeda. The HT group, to which Galiullin allegedly belonged, was not found. Sova also reported that since December 2004, the authorities in Tatarstan initiated criminal cases on charges of extremism and terrorism against alleged members of radical organizations, including HT and Islamic Jamaat. According to Sova, the Islamic Jamaat case was being heard in court in Tatarstan. Authorities charged twenty-three persons. The preliminary investigation was over, and five young men were being tried in court. Later, a trial for other members will take place. Among the charges are murder and planning hostile activities. In the authorities' case against the seven alleged HT members, the investigation cleared one of them, but the other six remain untried. In May 2005 authorities also brought to trial for alleged HT membership the two individuals who police in Izhevsk detained in December 2004. In June 2005, they were convicted each to one year of parole. At the end of the reporting period, the courts had convicted forty-six Muslims, twenty-nine of whom were in prison, for membership in Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

On March 31, 2006, Adygeia militia reportedly detained Muslims on their way to Friday prayer at the mosque in the nearby village of New Adygeia. According to news service IA Regnum, before the start of midday prayers, Special Forces of the Adygeia MVD blocked all entrances and exits to the village. The action was carried out by the local MVD office for fighting organized crime together with a group from the FSB. Muslims in Adygeia suspected that Special Forces had a list of Muslims

planning to pray in this mosque that included their license plates. One resident reported that only Muslims were stopped in their vehicles by road blocks and apprehended; those who tried to leave their cars were intimidated, and none of them were able to attend prayer. Another source reported that Special Forces threatened to break the legs of those who tried to leave their cars and walk to the mosque.

In Dagestan in March 2006, journalists reported that soldiers desecrated a copy of the Qur'an while searching the house of a killed militant.

The NGO Memorial reported government harassment of Muslims in Adygeia starting in summer 2005. Hostile actions reported included seizing religious literature from citizens. In one example from December 29, 2005, authorities claimed that the seizure of six books from one young Muslim was connected to the proceedings against former imam of the Adygeia mosque Nedzhmedin Abazia for "propaganda on the inferiority of citizens signaled by their relations with Hinduism, Christianity, and non-Wahabbist forms of Islam." Authorities questioned approximately ten persons in Adygeia in connection with this case.

On October 22, 2005, in Maykop, Adygeia Republic, police officers allegedly assaulted and apprehended a group of young Muslims, including the Maykop mosque's imam, as they were leaving a mosque. The imam reported that masked policemen dragged the group to minibuses and took them to the Interior Ministry's Anti-Organized Crime Department, where policemen beat and questioned them about why there were wearing beards and observing Islamic norms of hygiene. After a night in prison, officials took them before a judge who ordered their immediate release.

On October 13, 2005, gunman attacked police and military facilities in Nalchik, the capital of the southern republic of Kabardino-Balkaria in the North Caucasus. The attack appeared to have been the result of a combination of pressure by local authorities on independent mosques (closure of thirty-nine of forty-six local mosques), rampant corruption, and attempts by Chechen separatists to expand their war against the Government. It was known that nearly all of the several hundred militants killed during the violence were young untrained Muslims protesting the local Ministry of Internal Affairs' closure of mosques. Government officials said they arrested more than sixty persons on suspicion of participating in the October raids on Nalchik. Human rights groups, in turn, claimed the number of detainees was higher and that most of them were not responsible for the unrest. Some sources believed that several hundred fighters were killed and that the authorities had not returned to families the corpses of these fighters.

Human rights groups claimed that following the 2004 hostage-taking in Beslan, police stepped up activity in the North Caucasus. Authorities allegedly have charged with extremism increasing numbers of Muslims, both Russian citizens and citizens of the predominately Muslim states bordering Russia. Memorial described twenty-three cases involving more than eighty individuals charged with extremism as "trumped-up." Of these, the NGO Memorial reported, eighteen resulted in verdicts, only one of which was an acquittal. Some observers said that police harassment of Muslim clerics and alleged militants in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya, including torture and the closure of all but one of Nalchik's mosques during the reporting period, were part of the reason for the October 13, 2005 rebel attack on Nalchik.

According to the Sova Center, on April 19, 2005, nine female students were arrested during their regular reading of the Qur'an in a classroom at Kabardino-Balkariya State University. Authorities told the students when arresting them that wearing the hijab and group studying of the Qur'an violated university statutes. Police brought them to Nalchik city militia headquarters, searched, interrogated, and detained them for about eight hours. The same source claimed that police had detained some Muslims in Moscow mosques prior to the March 2004 elections.

There were occasional reports of short-term police detentions of non-Muslim believers on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries for brief periods throughout the country or asked them to cease their activities, such as displaying signboards, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing. During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses in particular reported approximately fifty-five recorded incidents, twenty-one of which took place in Moscow, in which authorities briefly detained their members or other citizens while conducting lawful preaching activities.

After months of demonstrations, arrests, court hearings, and time spent in jail in June 2005, Pastor Purshaga and members of Emmanuel Pentecostal Church in Moscow District won the right to rent land to use for a prayer house and church office building. At the end of the reporting period, authorities had not decided about another piece of land at issue.

In September 2004, an Initsiativniki prayer house in Lyubuchany, Chekhov District, Moscow Oblast, burned down. In the summer preceding the fire, security agen-

cies, including local police and FSB officers, intimidated several thousand participants at an open-air gathering sponsored by the church. Press reports claimed that eyewitnesses placed some of the same law enforcement personnel at the church site in September minutes before the fire broke out. Although the official investigation attributed the fire to arson, authorities had charged no one in the incident by the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country; however, there were increasing NGO reports of short-term detentions, especially in the North Caucasus.

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

Explicit, racially motivated violent attacks against Jews were fairly rare in the context of rapidly growing racist violence in the country, especially perpetrated by skinheads targeting identifiable ethnic groups. There were a series of attacks around a Moscow synagogue in Maryina Roscha in the winter of 2004–2005. In particular, the attackers beat Rabbi Alexander Lakshin. Following the attack against the rabbi, police promptly found the perpetrators; they were prosecuted and convicted, and attacks against Jews in the neighborhood stopped. There were three known explicit anti-Semitic violent attacks and four incidents of public insults and threats in 2005, which was down from 2004.

A notable exception was on January 11, 2006, in Moscow, when twenty-year-old Alexander Koptsev attacked worshipers in the Chabad synagogue with a knife, wounding eight people—among them citizens of Russia, Israel, Tajikistan, and the United States. On March 27, 2006, the Moscow City Court sentenced Koptsev to thirteen years' imprisonment, ordering him to undergo mandatory psychiatric treatment. The court dropped the charges of provoking interethnic hatred but left the charge of attempted murder of two or more persons for reasons of ethnic enmity. The lawyers of the victims filed an appeal since the prosecutor had dropped the charges of inciting ethnic hate; Koptsev's lawyers also filed an appeal due to his mental illness and the fact that none of the victims were killed or disabled. On June 20, 2006, the Supreme Court overturned the verdict on the grounds that the charges had not referred to the incitement of racial and religious hatred and ordered a new trial in a different court. Both President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov publicly condemned this attack.

On January 13, 2006, a local student made a copy-cat attack on a synagogue in Rostov-on-Don. He entered the synagogue attempting to attack worshippers, but security guards stopped him before he could harm anyone. Although authorities charged him with hooliganism, the court declared him mentally unfit to stand trial. On June 9, 2006, a court in Rostov-on-Don ruled that he undergo psychiatric treatment.

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. Sova Center noted in its 2005 report that RNE activities had been mostly reduced to picketing and distributing leaflets.

On November 6, 2005, Basmannyy District Court of Moscow convicted an RNE activist for propaganda and public demonstration of Nazi attributes and symbols and sentenced him to five days of detention under the Administrative Code. Officials detained the activist on November 4, 2005 among twelve RNE members who participated in a so-called "Right March."

According to an FJC report published in June 2005, a court in Velikiy Novgorod convicted three RNE members of inciting ethnic and religious hatred, and sentenced the leader of the RNE cell to four years in prison, and two others to two and three years. According to the Sova Center, in April 2005, authorities convicted two RNE members from Bryansk Oblast and gave them suspended sentences on charges of inciting racial hatred after distributing RNE leaflets and videos in Orel. After authorities announced the verdict, RNE activities in Orel noticeably intensified, and over thirty RNE members held a picket the day the verdict was announced, with RNE members from Bryansk, Moscow Region, and Belgorod coming to support their "comrades." On May 8, 2005 three RNE members distributed nationalistic leaflets in downtown Orel.

In October 2005 the MOJ registered the interregional social movement National Sovereign Way of Russia (NDPR). The organization is the successor of the National Sovereign Party of Russia (which has not been able to register as a political party) and preserved its abbreviation NDPR as well as the party's anti-Semitic, nationalistic ideology. In 2005 officials denied the St. Petersburg branch registration, although the organization tried to get registration based on the same documents as the Moscow branch.

Some NDPR branches in regions participated in official events that the local authorities organized. For instance, NDPR participated in a May 1, 2006 communist meeting in Moscow. NDPR also participated in May 1, 2006 events in St. Petersburg. In the summer of 2005, in St. Petersburg, NDPR participated in the events of the local legislative assembly twice. On July 19, 2005, the Altay NDPR branch participated in a rally of local trade unions and distributed its leaflets, although local authorities in attendance tried to halt it; local TV broadcast the event. At a small February 2005 rally in Moscow, NDPR members distributed anti-Semitic publications and engaged in anti-Semitic hate speech, and in 2004, activists distributed their newspaper and leaflets in downtown Kostroma.

The primary targets of skinheads were foreigners and individuals from the North Caucasus, but they expressed anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments as well.

The MBHR estimated more than 50,000 skinheads and 15,000 members of extremist organizations were acting in the country, who engage in approximately 300 incidents on ethnic hate grounds take place annually. However, in recent years there were at most only five indictments annually. MBHR reported that during the period from January to May 2006, officials registered over 100 skinhead attacks, killing 17 people and injuring approximately 130. No statistics on the number of skinheads in particular towns was available, but according to MBHR, among the cities where skinheads were especially active in 2006, were Moscow, St.Petersburg, Kostroma, Volzhsk, Voronezh Oblast, Tula Oblast, Cheboksary, Vladivostok, Yekaterinburg, Krasnoyarsk, Elista, Kaluga, Nizhniy Novgorod, Petrozavodsk, Ryazan, and Surgut. Authorities combined thirteen criminal cases of ethnic-extremist motivation that took place in St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast from 2003–2006 into one case for trial. MBHR noted that the skinhead movement continues to expand, spreading from major regional centers to small towns and settlements. In December 2005 skinheads appeared in the small settlement of Chagoda, Vologda region.

In connection with the April 2004 attack in Voronezh on human rights activist and anti-Semitism monitor Aleksey Kozlov, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that authorities arrested two young skinheads shortly thereafter and treated the attack as a misdemeanor unworthy of prosecution and closed the case. At least two demonstrations took place in Moscow on February 23, 2006, the Defenders of the Fatherland holiday. Participants displayed racist placards with slogans such as "Russia for ethnic Russians" and chanted racist slogans. According to reports, prominent members and leaders of the Rodina and Communist political parties participated in one of the demonstrations. Authorities gave administrative sanctions (fines and up to five days' administrative arrest for carrying a flag with a swastika) to the organizers of the march and a few participants belonging to RNE; officials did not charge anyone with incitement to racial hatred under Article 282 of the Criminal Code in connection with the march. In response to an appeal by the Moscow Anti-Fascist Center NGO, a court ruled on April 11, 2006, that the organizers had not violated any criminal laws.

On November 4, 2005, the Day of National Unity, in Moscow, the Movement against Illegal Immigration and other organizations organized a march of approximately one thousand persons, with openly racist slogans against migrants and Jews, entitled "Russia against the Occupiers."

Vandals desecrated Jewish cemeteries during the reporting period. Officials reported desecration in Omsk (April 15, 2006), the settlement of Khokhryaki near Izhevsk (November 2005), and Kostroma (October 2005). On October 16, 2005, vandals toppled and broke at least fifty tombstones, and on October 6, 2005, vandals desecrated approximately seventy Jewish graves in St. Petersburg. Vandals also desecrated graves in Velikiye Luki (September 20, 2005), Tambov (August 29 and August 31, 2005), and Tver (August 6, 2005). Earlier in 2005, vandals desecrated Jewish cemeteries in Kazan, Moscow, Saratov, Petrozavodsk, Makhachkala, Irkutsk, and St. Petersburg. In late May 2005, vandals painted swastikas on twenty-six Jewish tombstones in the Jewish section of Kazan's Arskoye Cemetery. The FJC reported that the authorities were investigating the incident as a hate crime and the Kazan City Council issued a statement condemning the attack. In May 2005 vandals desecrated Jewish graves at the Vostryakovskoye Cemetery, near Moscow; the case was being treated as a hate crime rather than simple "hooliganism." The Jew-

ish cemetery in Petrozavodsk was vandalized at least three times in 2004; a criminal investigation failed to identify the perpetrators.

One of the most large-scale desecrations occurred in St. Petersburg in December 2004, when vandals damaged approximately one-hundred graves at the St. Petersburg Preobrazhenskoye (Jewish) Cemetery. In the aftermath of the desecration, St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko met with the city's Chief Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Pewsner, and promised a serious investigation of the crime. Officials arrested members of a gang but reportedly, since its members were minors, the case was either dropped or the perpetrators received insignificant punishment.

Sometimes authorities prosecuted the perpetrators as in January 2005, when a court in Velikiy Novgorod issued a three-year prison term for planting a fake explosive device near the city's synagogue in 2003, and when authorities sentenced two adults and one minor to two years' probation for a 2004 desecration in Kaluga Kray.

Vandals desecrated several synagogues and Jewish community centers during the reporting period. In June 2006, officials reported that a man entered a Jewish cultural center in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, and stabbed the door of the synagogue ten times with a knife. Security guards caught him and had police arrest him. According to a report from the UCSJ, a May 18, 2006, article in the local newspaper "Saratovskaya Oblastnaya Gazeta" reported that the courts sentenced a 20-year-old man with a two-year suspended sentence for painting swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans on the walls of the Saratov Jewish center to which he had confessed when police caught him doing the same thing to a parked car. Unknown assailants have also thrown rocks at the center and its occupants through the windows. Local police allegedly ignored the Jewish community's complaints until the swastika-painting incident.

In April 2006, at the Orenburg synagogue, a group of young men threw stones, kicked the synagogue doors, shouted anti-Semitic slogans, and hit windows with a metal bar. Police detained a fifteen-year-old boy near the synagogue, while others escaped. Officials opened criminal proceedings on charges of hooliganism, not extremism, but since the boy was a minor, he could not face criminal punishment. In March 2006 vandals used paint to draw a swastika on the fence in front of the main entrance of the Jewish community center and the region's first synagogue under construction in Lipetsk. Vandals painted anti-Semitic insults and swastikas on the walls of synagogues in Borovichy (October 5, 2005) and Nizhniy Novgorod (September 5, 2005) similar to incidents in Vladimir (June 3, 2005).

In March 2006 a youth again vandalized the Jewish center in Penza, breaking one of its windows with a brick. Vandals had attacked this building and the Jewish center in Taganrog on a number of previous occasions in 2005 and 2004. In October 2004, congregants stopped a group of skinheads from entering the synagogue in Penza. Later that day, approximately forty people armed with chains and iron clubs approached the synagogue. Worshipers locked themselves inside and called the police who detained two or three of the perpetrators and forced them to repair the damage.

These incidents are similar to those reported for earlier reporting periods in Samara, Syktyvkar (Komi Republic), Petrozavodsk (Republic of Karelia) in March 2005 and Perovo, Moscow Oblast, in February 2005; in 2004 in Baltiisk, Kaliningrad Oblast, and in the city of Kaliningrad. In November 2004, on the anniversary of Kristallnacht, unknown individuals scrawled anti-Semitic graffiti on the headquarters of the Moscow-based "Holocaust Foundation."

In May 2005 a fire which authorities considered a case of arson destroyed the historic synagogue of Malakhovka in the outskirts of Moscow. Several days earlier, there had been a burglary at the synagogue. The FJC reported that officials suspected the same persons of both crimes and raised the possibility that they may have set the synagogue fire to destroy evidence related to the burglary, rather than as a hate crime. Authorities detained the main suspect, Andrei Terekhov, on May 14 after he broke into a Christian church in Malakhovka. On December 5, 2005, the trial started; the court ultimately convicted him of setting the fire in order to cover evidence of his robbery and sentenced him to five years in prison and a fine. The Malakhovka Jewish community was preparing to build a community center and a new synagogue at the same location. While the court required Terekhov to compensate for the arson, it was unlikely that he would be able to make any financial contribution.

The Jewish community center in the Moscow suburb of Saltykovka was hit by arson in January and February 2005. Investigators caught the man who set the arson fire; he denied being an anti-Semite and said that he could not explain his motivation for the arson. The prosecutors found no criminal substance in his actions and closed the case. Vandals desecrated the synagogue in the Perovo district of Moscow in January 2005 and again in February 2005.

Authorities arrested two students for posting Nazi posters in Petrozavodsk in April 2005, on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday. Reports indicate that the court punished them in accordance with the administrative code.

There were no developments in the 2004 cases of the beating of Ulyanovsk Jewish youth leader Aleksandr Golynsky and the skinhead vandalism of the Ulyanovsk Jewish Center. The FJC reported that the police released the suspects that community members had detained and delivered to them. There also were no developments in connection with the 2004 attack on the synagogue in Chelyabinsk.

A number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers that print anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic articles, many of which appear to violate the law against extremism, were readily available throughout the country. Although the production of this illegal material continued, authorities generally did not prosecute the publishers, although there were some noted recent exceptions described below. The estimated number of xenophobic publications exceeded one hundred; local chapters of the NDPR sponsored many of them. The larger anti-Semitic publications, such as Russkaya Pravda, Vityaz, and Peresvet, were easily available in many Moscow metro stations. Some NGOs claimed that the same local authorities that refused to take action against offenders owned or managed many of these publications. In addition, there were at least eighty websites in the country dedicated to distributing anti-Semitic propaganda.

On April, 4, 2006, St. Petersburg prosecutor Sergey Zaitsev rescinded the decision of his deputy, Alexandr Korsunov, who refused to prosecute the Rus Pravoslanaya (Orthodox Russia) editor Konstantin Dushenov for the publication of anti-Semitic materials. Although Korsunov found no criminal matter in Dushenov's publications, Zaitsev expressed a different position after the public criticized his deputy's decision.

On April 3, 2006, the Velikiy Novgorod (Central Russia) Prosecutor's Office initiated a criminal case against the Russian Veche editor Paul Ivanov. Ivanov was accused of "public calls to committing violence" and "fueling hatred and discord." Officials initiated the case after the staff of the St. Petersburg History Institute of the Academy of Sciences had examined several issues of the newspaper and found that they contained elements that could incite hatred.

According to the ADL, in March 2006 officials initiated a criminal case in Ulyanovsk against the publishers of the Vest newspaper for anti-Semitic articles. On February 2, 2006, the Moscow Procurator's Office initiated a criminal case over the distribution of anti-Semitic literature on the Internet, because this material had motivated Alexander Koptsev, who had attacked parishioners at the Bolshaya Bronnaya synagogue in January 2006. However, according to the ADL, the case might not prevent the future Internet distribution of anti-Semitic literature, because many extremist websites are registered abroad.

According to the Russian Jewish Congress, the Chita Russian Zabaikalie newspaper published anti-Semitic articles in February 2006. There were reports of anti-Semitic literature on sale in Saratov, Kaliningrad, Pertozavodsk, Rostov-on-Don, and other cities. The Our Strategy television program, which had broadcast anti-Semitic views, continued to air in St. Petersburg during the reporting period.

On January 11, 2006, the Tula newspaper Zasechniy Rubezh, named after its nationalist organization publisher, printed an interview with scholar I. Shafarevitch in which he stated he approved of the anti-Semitic "letter of 500." The letter, issued in January 2005, was signed by twenty Duma deputies. At the time, the newspapers Rus Pravoslavnaya and Za Russkoye Delo published articles supporting the letter.

On January 5, 2006, the Nizhniy Novgorod newspaper, Novoye Delo, printed an article which described the Khazars' adoption of Judaism more than 1,000 years ago in anti-Semitic terms and accused Jews of enslaving the Khazars, saying that the Jews turned Khazaria into a "blood-sucking spider that exhausted the neighboring countries."

In April 2005 Velikolukskaya Pravda, a newspaper supported by the authorities in Velikiy Luki in Pskov Oblast, published an anti-Semitic article which the local prosecutor began investigating as a possible hate crime. Per Sova Center, based on the fact of the publication of the article, Velikiye Luki City Procuracy initiated a criminal case for instigation of national hatred on June 1, 2005. On November 24, 2005, the City Procuracy dropped the case on the grounds of absence of crime in the action.

According to local representatives of the ADL, a St. Petersburg prosecutor initiated criminal proceedings against the publisher of the Our Fatherland newspaper, accusing it of hate speech in 2005. Officials gave the newspaper a warning, but there was no information on further proceedings.

The Ulyanovsk local newspaper Orthodox Simbirsk is still in circulation despite authorities holding preliminary hearings in January 2005 following a criminal case

against the editor in 2002 for demonizing Jews. The FJC reported that the newspaper fired the editor, and in March 2005 Governor Morozov of Ulyanovsk promised governmental financial support to prevent bankruptcy.

In December 2004, a court in Novosibirsk sentenced the editor of Russkaya Sibir, Igor Kolodezenko, to a two and half year suspended sentence for publishing anti-Semitic articles. Kolodezenko, whom the court convicted of inciting ethnic hatred in 2000, never served prison time because of a Duma commemorative amnesty.

In 2005 Volgograd's Voroshilovskiy District Prosecutor's Office decided not to pursue a criminal case against the editor of the newspaper Kolokol, accused of inciting ethnic hatred through a series of anti-Semitic articles. The MBHR and the Volgograd Jewish community had sought such a case, the latter appealing for action on numerous occasions, without result. The prosecutor reportedly found the statute of limitations applied to one of the offending articles and that the others did not meet sufficient cause of action under the hate crime laws.

An anti-Semitic novel, The Nameless Beast, by Yevgeny Chebalin, had been on sale in the State Duma's bookstore since September 2003, despite international publicity. The xenophobic and anti-Semitic text makes offensive comparisons of Jews and non-Russians. According to the ADL, authorities do not typically monitor for content books sold in the Duma. In cases where Jewish or other public organizations have attempted to take legal action against the publishers, the courts have been generally unwilling to recognize the presence of anti-Semitic content.

Anti-Semitic statements have resulted in formal prosecution, but while the Government has publicly denounced nationalist ideology and supports legal action against anti-Semitic acts, the reluctance of some lower-level officials to call such acts anything other than "hooliganism" remained problematic. According to the ADL, in 2006 human rights organizations made numerous attempts to prosecute the authors of the "Letter of 500." However, their attempts were unsuccessful. According to the Obschestvennoye Mnenie (Public Opinion) Foundation, after the January 2006 Moscow synagogue attack, the number of citizens who condemned anti-Semitism increased by almost 10 percent. A poll concerning the attack showed that the proportion of citizens who had a negative attitude towards anti-Semites increased from 34 to 42 percent, while the proportion of those who claimed to be indifferent to them decreased from 47 to 38 percent. Distrust and dislike of Jews was expressed by 7 percent of the respondents, while 5 percent sympathized with those who expressed dislike.

In January 2006, the Nizhniy Novgorod Muslim Council condemned Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's appeal to rid the world of Israel in an aggressive call for another Holocaust. The council issued a statement on International Holocaust Remembrance Day urging citizens to overcome anti-Semitism, extremism and xenophobia.

On June 8, 2005, Patriarch Aleksey II sent a statement to the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance meeting in Cordoba, Spain, in which, reportedly for the first time, he publicly referred to anti-Semitism as a "sin."

Members of the State Duma and other prominent figures expressed anti-Semitic sentiments. In January 2005, approximately 500 persons, including nineteen members of the Duma representing the Rodina Party and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), wrote to 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. The MFA condemned the letter as did President Putin, and the Duma passed a resolution condemning the letter in February 2005. In response, approximately 5,000 persons, reportedly including a number of ROC clerics and some prominent cultural figures, signed a similar anti-Semitic letter to the prosecutor general in March 2005. A Moscow district prosecutor opened an investigation into the Jewish organization that published the translation, as well as into charges brought by Jewish and human rights organizations that the letters violated federal laws against ethnic incitement, but closed both investigations in June 2005 without bringing charges. In January 2006, some of the deputies who had signed the letter said in an interview that the letter had been the "right step." One deputy even proposed at a Rodina meeting to repeat the letter with even wider distribution. Originally registered with well-known neo-Nazis on its electoral lists, Rodina attempted to improve its image by rejecting openly neo-Nazi candidates; however, it allowed others known for their anti-Semitic views to remain. On November 21, 2005, head of the Rodina party Dmitry Rogozin, in a meeting with Rabbi Lazar, claimed that neither he nor anyone around him from the party were anti-Semites. He claimed that although a number of members of the Rodina Duma faction did sign the "letter of 500," it included deputies who were not members of the party and therefore did not follow party discipline.

State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) are also known for their anti-Semitic rhetoric and statements. In earlier years, LDPR supporters rallied during Moscow's May Day celebration, carrying anti-Semitic signs and speaking out against what they called "world Zionism," but there were no reports of this during the period covered by this report. Nikolay Kurianovich, an LDPR Duma deputy, initiated and publicized the creation of a "list of the enemies of the Russian people," with mostly Jewish names on the list.

Some members of the KPRF also made anti-Semitic statements. For example, former Krasnodar Kray governor and current State Duma deputy Nikolay Kondratenko at a June/July 2004 conference in Beirut, blamed Zionism and Jews in general for many of the country's problems and blamed Jews for helping to destroy the Soviet Union. His speech was printed in the Communist Party's main newspaper Sovetskaya Rossiya and several regional papers, including the Krasnodar paper Kuban Segodnya and the Volgograd paper Volgogradskaya Tribuna.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In June 2006 the administration of Arsen Kanokov, president of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic (KBR), drafted a new three-year program to implement measures to protect human rights. The document assesses the work of republic and local government officials and of the Interior Ministry, which under its former head, Khachim Shogenov, reportedly targeted young Muslim men in a misdirected attempt to curb militant Islam.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice reported as of June 20, 2006 that the Land Committee of the Western District of Moscow officially allowed the Emmanuel Church to rent 4,000 square meters of land under the old House of Culture in the Solntsevo district of Moscow, which members planned to convert into a prayer house and church office buildng. As for the piece of land on Prospekt Verndaskoyo (Moscow Western District), authorities had not decided. This decision came after a Moscow district court ruled on November 14, 2005, that it agreed with the Emmanuel Pentecostal Church that the local authorities had violated the legal procedure for regulating public events in its handling of the Church's repeated demonstrations. The same court ruled on October 10, 2005, that thirteen police had wrongfully detained Emmanuel members following a demonstration a week earlier. Pastor Purshaga confirmed that his church—which had been staging regular demonstrations for over eight months—and protesting since 1996 discrimination that prevented them from building a Pentecostal Church, stopped encountering police obstruction following these court decisions. During their long fight, authorities arrested members and Pastor Purshaga on several occasions. They served five days in jail in June 2005.

In Voronezh the regional administration organized a roundtable meeting in November 2005 at which representatives from the police, the procuracy, the Federal Security Services, local authorities, universities, NGOs, academics, and religious groups discussed the problems of racism, intolerance, and interethnic relations. Following the meeting, officials set up a coordination committee chaired by the deputy governor of Voronezh region, bringing together law enforcement agencies, representatives from the town's universities, NGOs, and religious institutions with the aim of creating a plan of action.

Izvestiya reported that on May 17, 2005, the Moscow city government decided to create a two-year, $12.5 million (350 million ruble) program to promote interethnic tolerance.

Federal and regional officials participated actively in, and in many cases strongly supported, a range of NGO-organized programs to promote tolerance and the more effective handling of hate crimes.

In addition, the newly established Public Chamber, a body that the government set up to represent civil society and whose approach President Putin appeared largely to direct, recognized racism and intolerance as a serious issue and a priority on which to work. The Public Chamber set up a commission on tolerance and freedom of conscience.

In the past five years, the number of organized Jewish communities in the country has increased from 87 to more than 200. In 2005 officials dedicated new synagogues in Birobidzhan (Jewish Autonomous Oblast), Khabarvosk, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg; and opened a Jewish school in Kazan.

The reporting period witnessed a few developments in the cultural life of the Jewish community such as opening of a new building to house a Jewish Community Center in St. Petersburg in September 2005. The Federation of Jewish Communities, which officially accounts for 184 communities in 176 cities of the country, was restoring a synagogue in Irkutsk. The project was to be completed in the summer

of 2006. As of early 2006, the FJC had built eleven multifunctional community centers in the country. A Jewish center and synagogue are being constructed in Lipetsk, and the construction was expected to be competed in the fall of 2006.

The support of federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. On June 26, 2006, Arkadiy Gaydamak President of the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations of Russia, and Chief Rabbi of Russia Shayevich signed an investment contract regarding the construction of a Moscow Jewish community center. Work began on the construction of a $100 million dollar (2,700,000,000 rubles) complex 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.

On September 1, 2005, a center for scribing sacred Jewish scrolls opened in St. Petersburg for the first time in eighty years. Located in the Jewish educational center Tomhei Tmimim Lubavich Yeshivah, the center named "Merkaz Stam" will train specialists in scribing and verifying Torah scrolls, Tefillins, and Mezuzahs for use by the Jewish population in the city. A certified specialist from Israel directed the center.

See Anti-Semitic Acts section for reports of positive developments on closing of anti-Semitic newspapers, public opinion about anti-Semites, and condemnation of Iranian President Ahmadinejab.

Some minority groups were able to obtain restitution of their religious property. Press reports in August 2005 indicated that officials returned a church that Soviet authorities had confiscated in 1922 to a St. Petersburg Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Community. On September 5, 2005, authorities returned school buildings in Rostov-on-Don and Orenburg to the Jewish community, and in September 2004, they returned a synagogue in Vladivostok. In 2004, Tula City Duma returned a church to the Catholic community. On September 18, 2005 the Roman Catholic Church consecrated its new church in Pskov after many delays apparently due to ROC pressure.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that authorities resolved a child custody case in their favor during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Religious matters are not a source of pronounced societal tension or overt discrimination for most citizens; however, many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the ROC is a part of Russian culture. Instances of terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya have given rise to negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices are the primary motivation. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religions, and some ROC leaders expressed similar views. See the Anti-Semitic Acts section for additional information on this subject.

There is no large-scale movement to promote interfaith dialogue; however, some religious groups successfully collaborate on the local level on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialogues. Pentecostal and Baptist organizations, as well as the ROC, have been reluctant to support ecumenism. At the international level, the ROC has traditionally pursued interfaith dialogue with other Christian groups. Individuals associated with Russian Orthodox and Muslim hierarchies made numerous hostile statements opposing the decision and continued to consider it a source of tension.

A small splinter group of the RNE called "Russian Rebirth" registered successfully in the past in Tver and Nizhniy Novgorod as a social organization, prompting protests from human rights groups; however, in several regions such as Moscow and Kareliya, the authorities have limited the activities of the RNE by denying registration to their local affiliates. According to Sova Center, there were neither registration denials nor registrations of RNE during the reporting period.

Hostility toward non-Russian-Orthodox religious groups sparked harassment and occasionally physical attacks. The police investigation of the June 2004 killing of Nikolai Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism, finally produced suspects in May 2006. Moscow newspapers reported that in late May 2006 officials detained five men in St. Petersburg for possible ties to the killing of an African student and on suspicion of the murder of Girenko, according to city prosecutor

Sergey Zaitsev. The suspects, members of the Mad Crowd group, are thought to have killed Girenko as revenge for Girenko's testimony in court against another extremist group. Girenko had served for many years as an expert witness in trials involving alleged skinheads and neo-Nazis.

Muslims, the largest religious minority, continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some regions. After terrorists associated with Chechen, Ingush, and Islamic extremists seized a school in September 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 sixty miles southeast of Moscow, over the proposed construction of a mosque. Government officials, journalists, and the public have been quick to label Muslim organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Such sentiment has led to a formal ban on Wahhabism in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkariya. Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

On March 14, 2006, in the republic of Karachayevo-Cherkessia, unknown persons armed with Kalashnikovs fired twenty-seven cartridges at the home of mufti Ismail Hadzhi Berdiyev, chair of the Muslim Coordinated Council for Spiritual Management of Karachayevo-Cherkessia and Stavropol Regions.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers were generally harmonious. In Tatarstan, the authorities promoted the liberal brand of Islamic thought dubbed "Euro-Islam"; however, tensions occasionally emerged in the republic and the surrounding Volga region. Law enforcement organizations closely watched Muslim groups. Officials often described Muslim charitable organizations as providing aid to extremists in addition to their overt charitable work. 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.

In April 2006, officials detained seven teenagers between the ages of fifteen and sixteen in the town of Dzerzhinsk in the Nizhniy Novgorod Region for throwing stones and a Molotov cocktail at a local mosque. An investigation was continuing. On December 2, 2005, vandals set on fire a two-story wooden building housing the Muslim Board of Komi, which housed a mosque. The fire destroyed the roof and damaged thirty square meters of the premises; there were no injuries. The emergency situations' authorities said the fire was the result of arson.

In February 2005, vandals desecrated twenty-six tombs in a Muslim cemetery in Yoshkar-Oly; in January 2005, vandals desecrated ten tombs in the Donskoye Muslim cemetery in Moscow. Teenagers were suspected of involvement in both of these incidents. In January 2005, vandals painted swastikas on the walls of the "Tauba" mosque in Nizhniy Novgorod. Investigators characterized these crimes as "mere hooliganism" rather than as hate crimes, or national and religious extremism.

Although a Yekaterinburg journalist reported militiamen barred women wearing the hijab from local subway stations on several occasions in 2005, she did not know of similar incidents in the reporting period nor of any overt signs of intolerance toward Muslims on religious grounds.

On May 21, 2006, in downtown Yaroslavl, skinheads reportedly kicked a thirty-year-old Hare Krishna in the stomach several times.

According to press reports, in September 2004, representatives of the Aleksandr Nevsky Patriotic Society disrupted a pre-approved demonstration organized by Hare Krishna members in Saratov, held in memory of the victims of the terrorist attack in Beslan.

On November 14, 2005, a thirty-six-year-old resident of the Smolensk region detonated an explosive device in the ROC Chapel near the town of Vyazma because of his "dislike for the Russian Orthodox Church." Officials charged him under the Criminal Code for vandalism, illegal possession of weapons and explosives, and willing destruction of property using explosives.

On March 11, 2006, vandals robbed and desecrated the church of the Resurrection of Christ in the Vysotskoye settlement in Yaroslavskaya Region. On February 26, 2006, teenagers desecrated a chapel in the Smolenskoye cemetery in St. Petersburg, and on February 5, 2006, vandals broke street lamps and spray-painted the Center of Russian Spirituality of the Orthodox Church of the Mother of God with xenophobic slogans.

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, which occurred in August 2005. Other issues of concern that remained between the two groups include the ROC's continued negative perception that Roman Catholics proselytize across the country and a proposal by a local priest to open a small, three-room Catholic 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, and the Catholic Church indicated that the convent was not a full-fledged convent but a means for caring for local orphans.

In a meeting in March 2006 with a Franciscan Order delegation, Patriarch Aleksey II reportedly said that he hoped the Catholic Church would stop proselytizing Orthodox believers and those with Orthodox roots because the rivalry in winning souls makes their work more difficult at a time when the world needs the fruit of both churches in their Christian efforts.

In June 2005, Patriarch Aleksey met with the President of the Italian Parliament Pier Ferdinando and they jointly launched an appeal for Catholics and Orthodox to avoid "negative and anti-Christian tendencies" and to cooperate "against violence, egoism, and moral relativism."

In February 2006 Cardinal Roger Etchegaray traveled to Moscow to take part in celebrating the patriarch's birthday and feast day. Observers saw this as the result of the government's attempt to ease the tensions between the two churches and pave the way for a papal visit to Moscow, which President Putin has publicly championed, sending Foreign Minister Lavrov to the Vatican in June 2005.

On the night of April 27–28, 2006, vandals set fire to an Adventist church in Taganrog in Rostov Region, after breaking windows earlier that week. The fire was termed arson. It was the first such incident at that church.

Reports of the harassment of evangelicals and Pentecostals dramatically decreased during the reporting period. In contrast to previous reports and Helsinki Commission testimony in April 2005 about the vandalizing and burning of prayer houses in Nekrasovskoye, Chelyabinsk, Bratsk, Izhevsk, Buryatiya, Oshkar Ola, Khalsk, and Poldolsk, where authorities made no arrests, few such instances appeared to have occurred since September 2005, when Bishop Sergey Ryakhovskiy joined the Public Chamber. Nevertheless, African-Russian and African ministers of non-Orthodox Christian churches experienced prejudicial treatment, based apparently on a combination of religious and racial bigotry.

According to the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, in April 2005, the eve of Russian Orthodox Easter, vandals firebombed a Baptist church in Chelyabinsk. Local Baptists blame coverage in a news broadcast on a local television channel for characterizing the Baptists as a "totalitarian sect." According to church sources, after the fire, employees of the television station visited the church to apologize, saying they did not expect their report to have this effect. The station broadcast a retraction, and the pastor of the church and the local Baptist bishop called a press conference, this time receiving sympathetic television coverage.

Picketers held demonstrations outside New Life Church in Yekaterinburg on May 8, May 15, and May 22, 2005, but only a few people took part in them. Anti-Evangelical activists held pickets beginning in March 2005 in an attempt to demand city authorities evict the New Life Church from its building. This represented the near-cessation of members of the Orthodox Brotherhood and members of City Without Drugs picketing of Sunday services at Protestant churches in Yekaterinburg. The situation is calm according to the pastor of Living Word Church, the head of the Adventist congregation, and the Bishop of the New Life church. In April 2005, at the request of Protestant leaders, Yekaterinburg city officials began denying permission to groups who wished to picket outside Protestant churches, accusing members of these churches of torturing and even killing children, and espionage.

The press routinely continued to reference members of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious "sect," although they had been present in the country for approximately one-hundred years. In November 2004, the ROC-affiliated NGO Committee for the Salvation of Youth from Totalitarian Sects filed a claim with the prosecutor general seeking the dissolution of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. A common prejudice circulating among the general public was that members of Jehovah's Witnesses are "spies of imperialism." In January 2004, the governor of Stavropol Kray compared members of Jehovah's Witnesses to Wahhabis. This comparison resonated particularly strongly in Stavropol, an area that had been attacked by Chechen separatists.

According to Interfax, in September 2005 Yekaterinburg Russian Orthodox Archbishop Vikenty invited listeners of the Voskresenie Diocesan radio station to convert Jehovah's Witnesses to the Orthodox faith, referring to their beliefs as "delusions."

During the reporting period, officials reported thirty cases of physical attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country while they engaged in their preaching work; of these, five took place in Moscow. The authorities did not take any action against the assailants.

In April 2006 unidentified individuals reportedly climbed over the fence of the Pskov Kingdom Hall and broke two windows.

After nearly two years of criminal proceedings, in March 2005, authorities found the Sakharov Center Director and a staff member guilty of inciting religious hatred and fined them approximately $3,750 (100,000 rubles) each. Officials acquitted the third defendant of all charges. Although the Moscow City Court dismissed their appeal, the Center entered an appeal at the European Court in Strasbourg. The charges stemmed from a provocative 2003 exhibit of religious-themed art entitled "Danger, Religion!" Authorities never charged those who vandalized the exhibit with a crime, and the verdict leaves room for the state and the ROC to define parameters for religious and artistic expression.

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. Speakers associated with the ROC took part in antisect conferences and meetings around the country.

In 2004 the Izhevsk newspaper Infopanorama published an article that slandered the pastor of that city's Work of Faith Evangelical Church for which the newspaper later apologized. In Krasnodar Kray, the local Adventist congregation was unable to move the prosecutor general to initiate a criminal investigation against a television station that broadcast an allegation that the Adventists conducted ritual killings each year.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, a number of religious groups, NGOs, and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. embassy in Moscow and the consulates general in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok actively investigated reports of violations of religious freedom. In the period covered by this report, their contacts included government officials, representatives of all traditional and many "nontraditional" religious confessions, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, the Anti-Defamation League, lawyers representing religious groups, journalists, academics, and human rights activists.

The embassy and consulates worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs designed to sensitize law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. Senior embassy officials discussed religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the presidential administration and the Government, including the MFA, raising specific cases of concern. Federal officials responded by investigating some of those cases and by keeping embassy staff informed on issues they have raised. As part of continuing efforts to monitor the overall climate of religious tolerance, the embassy and consulates maintained frequent contact with working-level officials at the MOJ, presidential administration, and MFA.

The embassy addresses religious freedom by maintaining a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities. Two positions in the embassy's political section are dedicated to human rights and religious freedom issues. These officers work closely with other U.S. officers in Moscow and 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. Such issues were raised regularly in meetings with the Consular Department of the MFA and with the MVD. 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, and to maintain contact for emergency planning purposes and to inquire about the missionaries' experiences vís-a-vis immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He attended events on major religious holidays and often met with a range of religious leaders from various denominations. He

hosted discussions on religious freedom with the leaders of major religious denominations.

The U.S. Government continued to press the country to adhere 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.

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 in their consular district. During the reporting period, the consulate general in Yekaterinburg maintained a particularly active outreach program to the Muslim community of the Urals.

Consulate officials met with representatives of different religious groups in Ufa, including the chief mufti of the Central Muslim Spiritual Board, Talgat Tadjuddin, to discuss the current situation and U.S.-related issues.

As part of the embassy's outreach to the Muslim community and to promote tolerance, in summer 2005 the second annual English language camp sponsored by the embassy in Moscow and the consulate general in Yekaterinburg took place in Ufa, Bashkortostan. The two summer camps, each three weeks long, allowed approximately 200 children from low-income families to improve their English, leadership skills and understanding of U.S. culture.

In April 2006 the head of the Tajik NGO Somon who participated in the International Visitor Program (IVP) invited the Consul General to a seminar titled "Tolerance Starts at School." This seminar was the second stage of the "Teaching Tolerance" project sponsored by the Democracy Commission. The first stage took place in January 2006, and brought together teachers and representatives of ethnic NGOs in Yekaterinburg. The third seminar, in May, was geared to law enforcement officials.

The U.S. Government organized exchanges under the IVP with a focus on religious freedom issues. In February and March 2006, a group of religious leaders, NGO representatives, and journalists who covered religious tolerance issues from Yekaterinburg and Orenburg, visited the USA under the regional IVP "Community Activism in Promoting a Tolerant Society." After coming back, the Orthodox and Muslim religious leaders gave interviews to religion-oriented television and radio programs and newspapers, emphasizing their positive impressions of activities of U.S. NGOs, confessions, and government structures. A journalist published an article on this program in one of the major Yekaterinburg newspapers.

In February 2006, during the regional workshop for the American Corners, one session was devoted to outreach programs for the Muslim population. A deputy director of the Interethnic Information Center gave the coordinators advice on how to contact and attract the Muslim community to their events.

On February 28, 2006, 500 students from 7 Vladivostok universities attended a student conference sponsored by the consulate general in Vladivostok with the theme "Tolerance in Multi-Cultural, Multi-Ethnic, Multi-Faith Societies: Challenges, Practices, and Opportunities" at the Far Eastern State Technical University. More than fifty students delivered English-language presentations on international practices in tolerance, Consul General John Mark Pommersheim delivered opening remarks, and International Information Programs speaker Dr. Rock Brynner delivered the keynote address. There was also an NGO roundtable composed of U.S. Government exchange program alumni that featured religious tolerance as well.

In September 2005 a speaker on religious tolerance visited Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, and Zlatoust, which had experienced problems between religious groups, and met with religious communities, officials, journalists, human rights activists, and students.

In March 2005, the consulate general in Yekaterinburg supported an academic conference on ethnic and religious tolerance at Orenburg State University. The conference drew participants from throughout the country and Kazakhstan. The mufti of Orenburg Oblast and the head of the Orthodox Church in Orenburg both participated in the conference.

In September 2004, the consulate general in Yekaterinburg sent a group of ten primarily Muslim community and religious leaders from the Urals to the United States on a program entitled "Promoting Multiculturalism in Civic Life." As a result, one participant, a television producer, devoted an episode of her television show "Islam Today" to religious freedom in the U.S. and, along with another participant, founded the "Interethnic Information Center," which followed media coverage of ethnic and religious minorities and worked to educate journalists and government

officials on tolerance issues. The Democracy Commission gave them a small grant to create an on-line news portal for ethnic and religious organizations.

During the period covered by this report, the embassy's Democracy Commission, a small (up to $24,000 or approximately 648,000 rubles) grants program supporting local NGOs working on a range of issues, approved 4 tolerance-related grants totaling approximately $48,800 (approximately 1,317,600 rubles). A group of religious leaders from Yekaterinburg, representing multiple religious groups, participated in an International Visitor Leadership Program devoted to religious freedom of expression and the development of constructive interconfessional relations.

Between April 16 and 27, 2006, the Youth LINX program facilitated dialogues in Ivanovo, Kostroma, and Moscow among religious leaders in an effort to increase interfaith communication and understanding and expose local university students to tolerance issues. In Kostroma, for example, regional clergymen Father Grigoriy Chekmenyov, Father Mikhail Nasonov, Imam-Khatab Marat Zhalyaletdinov, and Rabbi Nison Mendl Ruppo served as panel experts, and a Kostroma State University student, trained on tolerance issues, moderated the discussion. Professors of the Philosophy Department of Kostroma State University and approximately fifty five students attended the event. Representatives of the Kostroma regional administration emphasized the importance of an open dialogue in promoting tolerance.

During the reporting period, the Southern Russia Resource Center (SRRC) conducted two workshops on interethnic tolerance specifically targeted to youth organizations, as well as a school for NGO leaders, two workshops in community mobilization in a post-conflict environment, and a public relations school for journalists and NGOs. The SRRC issued ten grants to six Chechen, three Ossetian, and one Ingush organizations to promote tolerance among youth in these republics; these projects ended in March 2006. In February 2006 the SRRC signed an agreement with the Ministry of Nationalities in Ingushetia to support SRRC's activities in the republic and to consult the Ministry about the issues of interethnic understanding and cooperation.

In June and July 2005, U.S. Government grantee, SRRC, in partnership with the Tolerance Institute, conducted seminars for sixty participants from North Ossetia, Chechnya and Ingushetia, promoting models for how to prevent and address such problems as xenophobia, cultural ignorance, and interethnic conflict. Participants included NGO leaders, journalists, youth leaders, and regional and local government officials.

The United States supported two additional tolerance projects through the PartNER (Partnerships, Networking, Empowerment, and Roll-out) program, which ended in December 2004. One of these projects, the Ural NGO Support Center (UNGOSC), worked to encourage public discussion of ethnic and religious tolerance in Perm. UNGOSC worked with media outlets and various organizations to publicize program activities, conduct a training program for journalists to promote more responsible media coverage on racial and ethnic issues, recruit training participants and stage public awareness campaigns and seminars. Officials conducted the other tolerance project at the Volga Humanitarian-Theological Institute in Nizhniy Novgorod, which provided representatives of government and religious organizations with a series of seminars to educate participants and help them focus their thoughts and ideas on religious policy issues. The activity of religious communities in the Volga Federal District increased as a result of this project by uniting their efforts to assist street children, migrants, and other people in difficult situations and establishing a website to serve as a virtual resource center for state officials and community leaders.

In 2004–2005, the U.S. continued to support through a grant the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal's "Climate of Trust" program, which focuses on forming and strengthening Regional Tolerance Councils in Kazan, Ryazan, and Leningrad Oblast. As the result of the program, officials introduced tolerance courses for militia cadets in the St. Petersburg Law Institute of the General Procuracy and the Ryazan Branch of the Moscow Academy of the MVD. Tatarstan's regional Ministry of Education signed an agreement on March 1, 2005, in which it pledged to include tolerance courses in continuing education programs for school teachers.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 37.57 square miles and a population of approximately 30 thousand.

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 is estimated that more than 95 percent of the population was Roman Catholic. Other religious groups included 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, the Baha'i Community, and Jehovah's Witnesses).

In 1993, some parliamentarians objected to the traditional 1909 oath of loyalty sworn on the "Holy Gospels." Following this objection, Parliament changed the law in 1993 to permit a choice between the traditional oath and one in which the reference to the Gospels was replaced with "on my honor." In 1999, a European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling implicitly endorsed the revised 1993 legal formulation. The ECHR also noted that the traditional oath continues to be mandatory for other offices, such as the captain regent or a member of the Government; however, by the end of the period covered by this report, no elected Captain Regent or government member had challenged the validity of the 1909 oath.

There are no private religious schools; the school system is public and is financed by the state. Public schools provide Catholic religious instruction; however, students may choose without penalty not to participate.

Epiphany, Saint Agatha, Easter, Corpus Domini, All Saints' Day, Commemoration of the Dead, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, and government and religious officials encourage mutual respect for differences.

The country's role protecting religious minorities during World War II, including 100,000 total refugees, approximately 1,000 percent of the country's regular population at the time, is a public 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 suasion involved.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its policy to promote human rights and has always found the Government fully open to such discussions.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

The constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro provide for freedom of religion, and the state union Government generally respected this right in practice. There was no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the majority Serbian Orthodox Church received some preferential consideration. The constituent republics of the state union handled most religious affairs. The constitution and laws of the republic of Montenegro provided for freedom of religion and generally respected this right in practice. The republic of Serbia adopted a discriminatory law on religion that creates an inequality among religious groups. President Tadic indicated that he would seek to amend the law which, in its current version, would impede the free practice of religion in Serbia.

During the period covered by this report, Montenegro's government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion in its republic. However, government respect for religious freedom in Serbia deteriorated over the period because of the problematic law on religion.

There were some instances of discrimination and acts of societal violence directed against representatives of religious minorities in Serbia and Montenegro. The Jewish community in Serbia reported continuing incidents of anti-Semitism, including anti-Semitic books, during the period covered by this report; however, there were fewer incidents directed at religious groups overall than during the previous reporting period. Leaders of minority religious communities often reported acts of vandalism, hate speech, physical attacks, and negative media reports labeling them "sects," "satanists," or "deviants." Police and government officials took some positive steps in response to acts of hate speech and vandalism; however, in Serbia, the punishments for perpetrators tended to be lenient.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the state union and republic governments as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives meet regularly with representatives of ethnic and religious minorities as well as with government representatives to promote respect for religious freedom. During the reporting period, embassy representatives advocated for changes in the laws on religion and restitution that would rectify some of the discriminatory aspects of the legislation. The embassy also assisted in rebuilding administrative offices of the Islamic communities in Belgrade and Nis that were heavily damaged by fires in March 2004.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The state union of Serbia and Montenegro (excluding U.N.-administered Kosovo) has an area of nearly 35,300 square miles and a population of approximately 8,186,000. The predominant faith in the country was Serbian Orthodoxy. Approximately 78 percent of the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro, including most ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins who professed a religion, were Serbian Orthodox. The Muslim faith was the second largest in Serbia and Montenegro, with approximately 5 percent of the population, including Slavic Muslims in the Sandzak, ethnic Albanians in Montenegro and southern Serbia, and Roma located throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Roman Catholics comprised approximately 4 percent of the population and were predominantly ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina, ethnic Albanians in Montenegro, and ethnic Croats in Vojvodina and Montenegro. Protestants made up approximately 1 percent of the population and included Adventists, Baptists, Reformed Christians, evangelical Christians, members of the Church of Christ, and Pentecostals. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses were also present. Serbia and Montenegro had a small and aging Jewish population numbering between 2,000 and 2,400. The remainder of the population professed other faiths or claimed to be atheist. In a 2002 census, 3 percent of Serbian citizens claimed to be nonbelievers or declined to declare a religion. According to Montenegro's 2003 census, almost 70 percent of its population was Orthodox, 21 percent was Muslim, and 4 percent was Catholic.

Approximately one hundred foreign missionaries from several faiths operated in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and those of the republic of Montenegro provide for freedom of religion, and the governments at these levels generally respected this right in practice. However, the law on religion in Serbia, adopted in April 2006, discriminates among religious groups and requires minority religious groups, including religions that have been previously recognized, to re-register through an invasive and burdensome procedure in order to attain or retain their status as recognized religions.

There is no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the Montenegrin Republic's constitution mentions the Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community, and Roman Catholic Church by name, stating that these and other religions are separate from the state. Serbia's law on religion recognizes seven "traditional" religious communities: The Serbian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Slovak Evangelical Church, the Reformed Christian Church, the Evangelical Christian Church, the Islamic religious community, and the Jewish religious community. The 2005 law on finance also recognizes only these seven religious groups, granting them tax exemptions, although the law was pending in the Constitutional Court at the end of the reporting period, and the minister of religion wrote letters to several minority religious groups stating that they would not have to pay taxes.

Serbia has not recognized other Orthodox churches, despite attempts by the Macedonian, Romanian, and Montenegrin Orthodox churches to gain recognition. The new religion law reinforces this unwillingness to recognize them: Article 19 stipulates 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 as those are already found in the names of the traditional churches.

Serbia's law on religion was the sixth iteration of a bill that was long under development. Previous versions perpetuated the special status and privileges of the seven traditional communities, but the Government had appeared committed to working with religious communities and the international community to grant privileges to smaller religious groups. However, the sixth version was submitted without adequate opportunity for comment. Key articles of the law that would grant the privileges of the traditional seven to pre-existing religious communities, including many smaller Protestant churches, were inexplicably dropped from the text at the last minute. Religious groups and international organizations who had long been engaged on the issue were not informed of last-minute changes in the draft and were caught unawares by Parliament's passage and the president's subsequent signing of the bill. President Tadic himself expressed reservations about the legislation; he attached a list of his reservations when he signed the bill and acknowledged that the legislation did not conform to international standards.

Many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), religious communities, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission were highly critical of Serbia's religion law. It recognizes the "traditional" seven religious communities, while all other religious groups must now re-register with the Ministry of Religion, which has the discretion to decide whether to grant approval. Many of the religions now required to re-register have been recognized officially as religions in Serbia for over 50 years, and have been present in the republic for as long as 150 years.

The registration requirements, deemed invasive by the Council of Europe, include submitting names, identity numbers and signatures of members; proof that the religious group meets the threshold of 0.001 percent of adult citizens of Serbia (approximately sixty-five persons); the group's statute and summary of its religious teachings, ceremonies, religious goals, and basic activities; and information on sources of funding.

Montenegro has no legislation to regulate the work of religious communities.

The Orthodox Church also received preferential treatment beyond tax exemptions: The Serbian 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.

The Serbian Government required all religious organizations to submit annual financial statements as businesses. On March 2, 2005, Novi Sad's commercial court fined Serbia's Baptist Union $308 (20,000 dinars) and its vice president, Zarko Djordjevic, $62 (4,000 dinars) for failure to comply, but suspended the fines because the Baptist Union had been unaware of the requirement. In 2004, the Adventist Church was fined $633 (500 euros) for the same offense. In 2005, legal proceedings were underway against the Adventist Church and the financial director of the Ser-

bian Orthodox diocese of Raska/Prizren for failure to submit annual financial statements; the defendants submitted their paperwork and charges were dropped.

Religious education in Serbian primary and secondary schools continued during the period covered by this report. According to a 2001 Serbian government regulation, students are required either to attend classes from one of the seven "traditional" religious communities or to substitute a class in civic education. The proportion of students registering for religious education remained approximately equal to the proportion registering for civic education courses during the reporting period. Some Protestant leaders and NGOs in Serbia and in Montenegro continued to voice their objection to the teaching of religion in public schools. In Montenegro, religious studies have not been introduced as a subject in primary and secondary schools.

Orthodox Christmas and Orthodox Easter are public holidays in Serbia and Montenegro. These holidays do not negatively affect other religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. However, 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 as "sects," "satanists" and "deviants." In addition, government actions have made it difficult for Orthodox churches not recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church to operate in Serbia, including the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Macedonian Orthodox Church, and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church.

Local authorities ordered the demolition of a Romanian Orthodox church built on private, rural land (which does not require building permits) in the village of Malajnica, Serbia. The authorities evidently acted because the local Serbian Orthodox clergy had not granted approval for the church as a matter of Orthodox Church rules and jurisdiction. The case was pending in the Supreme Court at the end of the reporting period, and the church remained standing. Local authorities also threatened to charge the church for the demolition of its own building.

There is no chaplain service in the armed forces. Although local Serbian Orthodox priests are the only clergy offering religious services at armedforces chapels, members of the armed forces of other faiths can 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, which would require separate kitchens.

In Montenegro, the Reis of the Islamic Community noted that Islamic prisoners and army conscripts have difficulty in receiving proper foods, i.e. meals without pork.

The town of Leskovac, Serbia, has a municipal Council for the Prevention of Addictions and Religious Sects. The Council identified Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, the Evangelical Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and "satanists" as sects and promoted propaganda against them.

There was limited progress in Serbia during the period covered by this report on restitution of previously seized religious property. The Government reported that it was near to completing a register of seized religious property. As a temporary measure, a few religious communities were granted free use of some facilities that had been seized from them. At the close of the reporting period, Parliament was considering a draft law on restitution of religious property in Serbia. This draft law would recognize 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.

The Belgrade Islamic community reported continued difficulties in acquiring land and government approval for an Islamic cemetery near the city. Religious organizations generally continued to report difficulty obtaining permission from local authorities in Serbia to build new worship facilities.

Montenegro's 2004 Law on Restitution treats religious property as it treats privately owned property. In Montenegro, the Serbian Orthodox Church claimed property comprising a significant part of the Republic's territory.

In 2004, the Government of Montenegro built a temporary waste facility on a site in Lovanja. A claim filed by Catholic priest Don Branko Zbutega that the Catholic Church held title to some of the land was rejected, and a countersuit filed against him by the Montenegrin Government was upheld. Zbutega appealed the $2,510 (2,000 euros) fine imposed on him in the case. The court trial regarding the ownership of Lovanja was pending; Zbutega died in April 2006.

The Montenegrin Government challenged a decision by the Ministry of Defense of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to transfer military property to the majority Serbian Orthodox Church in 2003. Montenegrin officials claim the transfer

was an illegal attempt to prevent the Republican Government from obtaining this property when the federal state was dissolved and replaced by the state union of Serbia and Montenegro. The case remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report, largely because of a moratorium on most transfers of military property.

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 in Serbia 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. These same sources associated anti-Semitism with anti-Western and anti-globalization sentiments, as well as with nationalism.

On July 10, 2005, graffiti appeared in Smederevo's main square that read, "Beware of the Jewish influence on government and the private sector," "Inflation comes from the Jews," "Death to Zionism," and "Riot against Jews," and included swastikas and Nazi slogans. Smederevo police arrested two suspects and a court sentenced them to thirty days in prison for inciting national, religious, and racial hatred. On July 11, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared on a Novi Sad synagogue; the perpetrators remained unidentified.

On September 3, 2005, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared on a Novi Sad synagogue during the celebration of Days of Jewish Culture in Serbia. On September 5, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared again in Smederovo.

On November 18, 2005, a guest on the television show "Problem" alleged that Jews knew in advance about the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States. The guest also made disparaging remarks about Jews in Serbia.

On February 12, 2006, graffiti appeared on a monument in Nis saying "Holocaust—the Jewish lie that governs the world," along with nationalistic slogans such as "Serbia for the Serbs."

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the NGO Center for Tolerance and Inter-Religious Relations, the amount of anti-sect reporting in the media declined slightly during the reporting period. The number of attacks against religious minorities also generally declined during the period.

While Serbia's law on religion discriminates against minority religious groups, the seven "traditional" religious groups recognized by the law reported a general improvement in their status during the reporting period. These groups welcomed the new law on religion as a step that, while imperfect, is in their view a positive first step toward improving interreligious relations.

Police continued to guard the Belgrade mosque since it was attacked in March 2004. They also provided security in front of the Belgrade synagogue.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

While relations between members of different religious groups were generally good, there were some instances of discrimination against representatives of religious minorities in the country. 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.

Minority religious communities in Serbia continued to experience problems with vandalism of church buildings, cemeteries, and other religious premises. Most attacks involved spray-painted graffiti; thrown rocks, bricks, or bottles; or vandalized tombstones.

On July 5, 2005, several tombstones at the Catholic graveyard in Srpski Itebej near Zrenjanin were severely damaged and leveled to the ground. On July 15, unknown perpetrators set fire to the door of the Adventist church in Rakovica, near Belgrade. On July 21, windows at the Backa Palanka Adventist church were broken; similar attacks at the same place occurred August 13 and August 21. Police charged a group of suspects with property damage.

On August 12, 2005, unknown perpetrators broke windows and painted graffiti on the Adventist church in Sivac. On August 27, windows were broken at the regional headquarters of the Adventist Church in Novi Sad. On September 7, dozens of

graves at the Sencansko Catholic graveyard in Subotica were desecrated. Subotica's mayor condemned the attacks.

Unknown attackers broke stained glass windows at the Catholic church in Smederevo in early January 2006 and again on March 24. On April 20, the stained glass windows at the Catholic church in Kragujevac also suffered damage from attacks.

While harassment of religious minorities was generally limited to crimes against property and occasional verbal abuse, physical attacks on persons occurred in Serbia during the reporting period. On July 11, 2005, three unknown assailants stabbed a Hare Krishna in the chest while he was walking on the street late at night; according to media reports, the assailants told him he should be burned at the stake. Between July and November 2005, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were physically attacked on four separate occasions. Although the victims reported the incidents to the Belgrade police, providing video footage of one attack, the police told them it would be difficult to apprehend the perpetrators since they were minors.

In 2004, police arrested 110 persons for an attack on the Belgrade mosque in March 2004. In April 2005, one of these persons was sentenced to three months' imprisonment in connection with the attack. A trial of ten other persons indicted in the attack was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The Serbian Government repaired the outside of the mosque but had not repaired the interior. The Government also pledged funds toward repair of other buildings on the mosque compound, but provided only a portion of the amount promised. The U.S. Embassy earmarked $60,000 for the reconstruction of the administrative building, including its school facilities and a computer center, and began work in January 2006.

In July 2005, a municipal court convicted and sentenced eight persons to spend three to five months in prison for the March 2004 burning of the Islam-Aga mosque in the southern Serbian city of Nis, the first such conviction for anti-Muslim violence from that period. Muslim leaders criticized the sentences as too lenient. Numerous police present at the court building at the time of the trial did not intervene when the defendants' followers chanted "Death to Muslims." Nis authorities provided $4,688 (300,000 dinars) toward repair of the Nis mosque. The U.S. Embassy began plans to fund the design and engineering work, estimated at $15,000 to $20,000, to build a community center at the site of the burned mosque.

Anti-sect propaganda decreased slightly in the Serbian press, which labeled smaller, multiethnic Christian churches—including Baptists, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses—and some other smaller religious groups as "sects" and claimed they were dangerous. Religious leaders noted that instances of vandalism often occurred soon after press reports on sects. On August 18, 2005, the Belgrade daily Vecernje Novosti published an article attacking the Oasis Pentecostal Romany children's center in Jagodina, calling it "sectarian" since it did not perform Orthodox rites. In the article, Orthodox priests claimed the center was a "sect, since it is obvious that it is a religious organization that rebaptizes children." On September 7, Pancevacke Novine weekly in Pancevo denigrated members of the Mormon and Jehovah's Witnesses communities as "false benefactors who under a mask are offering secrets of 'the way of happiness and body' and bring their victims to complete disaster, loss of their houses and apartments, friends, family and almost sanity."

In Montenegro, the Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox communities coexisted within the same towns and often used the same municipally owned properties to conduct worship services. Tensions continued between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church. These tensions were largely political, stemming from Montenegro's periodic drive for independence that started in 1997 and increased occasionally with the approach of the May 2006 referendum on independence. The two churches continued to contend for adherents and to make conflicting property claims, but this contention was not marked by significant violence.

The Montenegrin Institute for Protection of Monuments and Cultural Heritage accused the Serbian Orthodox Church of "counterfeiting" Montenegro's cultural heritage at several locations (Church of the Holy Trinity, Ostrog Monastery, Beska Church, etc.) by performing illegal restoration and conservation works, some of which altered the content of some ancient artwork and frescoes. The state directorate responsible for the prevention of illegal building prohibited several construction projects on church facilities run by the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, Serbian Orthodox clergymen ignored inspections several times, claiming to be solely responsible for the Serbian Orthodox church property in Montenegro. In practice, it was not clear who controlled construction and restoration of church buildings in Montenegro.

On January 6–8, 2006, at their third formal conference in Cetinje, representatives of the orthodox churches of Georgia, Ukraine, Italy, Bulgaria, and Montenegro

adopted a Declaration of Unanimous Support to the Montenegrin Autocephalous Church. The Serbian Orthodox Church described the event as "the meeting of godless people."

From February 14 to 17, 2006, the Government of Montenegro organized an international convention of orthodoxy in Montenegro's historic capital, Cetinje, which was seen as an effort by the Government to restore good relations with the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro on the eve of the May 21 referendum on independence.

In June 2005, the Serbian Orthodox Church, with the assistance of a Serbia and Montenegro army helicopter, erected a church on the peak of Mount Rumija, near the city of Bar, without a valid permit. The Serbian Orthodox Church was accused of violating a century-long tradition of good interethnic relations among the three confessions (Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim) living in Bar. While government authorities announced the "imminent" removal of the church, no actions were taken by the end of the period covered by this report. The Serbian Orthodox Church announced that it would ask for the necessary permits to legalize the church. Serbia and Montenegro Army Chief of Staff Dragan Paskas was relieved of office for allowing the use of the helicopter.

In September 2005, a delegation of prelates from Montenegro, including the leader of the Montenegrin Orthodox Church Mihajlo, Catholic priest Don Branko Zbutega, and the previous Reis of the Montenegrin Islamic Community Idris Demirovic, paid homage to the victims of Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with both republics' governments as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, and continues to promote ethnic and religious tolerance throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Embassy officials meet regularly with the leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Government to promote respect for religious freedom and human rights.

During the reporting period, the embassy began projects to help the Islamic communities in Belgrade and Nis rebuild facilities that were heavily damaged from the ethnically motivated attacks of March 2004. Embassy officials worked with the Serbian religion minister, leaders of religious communities, international organizations and NGOs, and directly with President Tadic and Prime Minister Kostunica 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, to counter 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

Kosovo continued to be administered under the civil authority of the U.N. Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244. UNMIK and its chief administrator, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), established a civil administration in 1999, following the conclusion of the NATO military campaign that forced the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo. Since that time, the SRSG and UNMIK, with the assistance of the international community, have worked with local leaders to build the institutions and expertise necessary for self-government under UNSCR 1244. UNSCR 1244 also authorized an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR) to provide a safe and secure environment.

The UNMIK-promulgated Constitutional Framework for the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) in Kosovo provides for freedom of religion, as does UNMIK Regulation 1999/24 on applicable law in Kosovo; UNMIK and the provisional institutions of self-government generally respected this right in practice. Attacks by Kosovo Albanians against Kosovo Serbs peaked following the NATO campaign in 1999, and again in March 2004, when violence perpetrated by Kosovo Albanians resulted in the deaths of 19 persons (11 Kosovo Albanians and 8 Kosovo Serbs), 954 injuries, and widespread property damage, including 30 Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries, cemeteries and more than 900 homes.

Respect for religious freedom increased during the period covered by this report and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Historically, tensions between Kosovo's Albanian and Serb populations have

been largely rooted in ethnic, rather than religious, bias. Roman Catholic institutions were not targets. Attacks on Orthodox religious sites significantly decreased after the March 2004 riots, although some minor vandalism occurred during the period covered by this report.

The violent events of March 2004 slowed the transfer of responsibility for the protection of Serbian Orthodox churches and other religious symbols from the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) to U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS). KFOR halted the process immediately following the March 2004 riots and increased the number of checkpoints near Serbian Orthodox churches, monasteries, and patrimonial sites; however, the transfer process has since continued. For example, KFOR relaxed its two fixed checkpoints on either side of the main road to Decani monastery on April 27, 2006. Kosovo leaders, with the acceptance of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), sought to address the concerns of persons displaced by the violence, reconstructed all but a handful of houses damaged, and funded and finished preliminary assessments on thirty religious sites damaged in March 2004.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government has contributed to the continued safekeeping of Islamic manuscripts, refurbished through U.S. Government funds. After six years of international community assistance, the PISG must still fully address interethnic reconciliation and make further progress on implementing the "Standards for Kosovo," which help provide the framework for establishing a multiethnic, sustainable democratic society. In October 2005, the U.N. Security Council endorsed the U.N. secretary general's intention to begin status negotiations for Kosovo, which include discussions on the protection of cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo. As a member of the Contact Group and contributor to the NATO-led Kosovo Force, the United States remains fully involved in all aspects of peacekeeping and democratization in Kosovo. The U.S. Government also supports UNMIK and KFOR in their security and protection arrangements for churches and patrimonial sites. In December 2004, the SRSG and KFOR commander signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which specifies response mechanisms and cooperation between the KPS and KFOR to maintain order. Contingency plans for riot control have been revised to include an operational presence in municipalities and permanent contact among local police, UNMIK, communities, village leaders, and local authorities.

Over the course of the period covered by this report, the UNMIK police community policing initiative completed phased deployment of 350 international police officers to 30 locations in the region that are considered sites for potential return of displaced persons and those inhabited by minority communities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Kosovo has an area of approximately 4,211 square miles and a population of approximately 2 million, although the last credible census was taken in the 1980s. Islam was the predominant faith, professed by most of the majority ethnic Albanian population, the Bosniak, Gorani, and Turkish communities, and some in the Roma/Ashkali/Egyptian community, although religion was not a significant factor in public life. Religious rhetoric was largely absent from public discourse, mosque attendance was low, and public displays of conservative Islamic dress and culture were minimal. The present Serb population in Kosovo, which was estimated at 100,000 to 120,000 persons, was largely Serbian Orthodox. Approximately 3 percent of ethnic Albanians were Roman Catholic. Protestants made up less than 1 percent of the population and had thirty-six churches and small populations in most of Kosovo's cities, the largest concentration located in Kosovo's capital of Pristina. Approximately forty persons from two families in Prizren had some Jewish roots, but there were no synagogues or Jewish institutions. Estimates of atheists or those who did not practice any religion were difficult to determine and/or largely unreliable.

Foreign clergy actively practiced and proselytized. There were Muslim, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant missionaries active in Kosovo. Roman Catholic communities were concentrated around Catholic churches in Prizren and Pristina. UNMIK estimated that seventy-one faith-based or religious organizations, which listed their goals as providing humanitarian assistance or faith-based outreach, worked in Kosovo. In March, UNMIK transferred the tracking of such organizations to the Ministry of Public Services, but the ministry had not provided any new information by the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

In 2001, UNMIK promulgated the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo (the "Constitutional Framework"), which established the PISG and replaced the UNMIK-imposed Joint Interim Administrative Structure. Following November 2001 central elections, the 120-member Kosovo Assembly held its inaugural session in late 2001. In 2002, the Assembly selected Kosovo's first president, prime minister, and government. Kosovo's latest government was formed after the Kosovo Assembly elected Fatmir Sejdiu as Kosovo's president on February 10, 2006, and Agim Ceku as Kosovo's prime minister on March 10, 2006. UNMIK had transferred most of the authority authorized by the Constitutional Framework to the PISG, and, while it transferred some competencies to the Ministries of Justice and Interior in February 2006, UNMIK and NATO retained ultimate authority in such areas as security and protection of communities.

Kosovo's Constitutional Framework incorporates international human rights conventions and treaties, including those provisions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religion and ethnicity; UNMIK and the PISG generally respected this right in practice. UNMIK, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the PISG officially promote respect for religious freedom and tolerance in administering Kosovo and in carrying out programs for its reconstruction and development. UNMIK, as Kosovo's final administrative decision-maker, sought to protect religious freedom in full.

UNMIK recognizes as official holidays some, but not all, holy days of the Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox religious groups. UNMIK recognizes the major religious Orthodox and Islamic holy days of Orthodox Christmas, Eid-al-Adha, Orthodox Easter Monday, Orthodox Assumption Day, the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and western Christmas.

There are no mandatory registration regulations with regard to religious groups; however, to purchase property or receive funding from UNMIK or other international organizations, religious organizations 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. Protestant evangelical community representatives have complained that they cannot receive documentation proving religious or NGO status in Kosovo because the Ministry of Public Services requires that they be a documented entity for at least five years before they can be legally registered as an NGO.

In response to the complaint that religious communities should have special status other than that of NGOs, the Kosovo Prime Minister's Office established a working group to draft a law on religious freedom and the legal status of religious communities in 2003. The group consisted of representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic religious groups in Kosovo; Serbian Orthodox representatives declined to participate. Nonetheless, the working group continued to provide Serbian Orthodox representatives with drafts of the law.

On May 20, 2005, the Kosovo Assembly passed the first reading of the draft law on Religious Freedom and the Legal Status of Religious Communities in Kosovo, which would further protect the rights of religious communities and individuals. Before the draft law's first reading in May 2005, the Islamic community and Roman Catholic leadership proposed new amendments to this draft, which included: Labeling the Islamic community the "only representative" of Kosovo Muslims; establishing a ministry of religion; and exempting religious communities from paying utilities. The assembly committee did not add these provisions to the draft law. After the first reading in the Assembly, the law went back to parliamentary committee for further debate. The Islamic community lobbied local political leadership for inclusion of amendments which continue to require a minimum number of adherents before a religious group can be registered as a "special status" religion and in a "special relationship with the Government," which Protestant religious groups in Kosovo believe would pave the way for the teaching of religion in public schools. In December 2005, a group of religious leaders from the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Islamic Community, the Roman Catholic community, and the Jewish community (in Serbia), as well as working-level PISG representatives in Vienna, drafted these changes as amendments to the law, but the assembly committee did not add these elements into the law sent to the Government for approval. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Contact Group named this law among three pieces of priority legislation that the PISG is to pass in 2006. The law had not been given a second reading in the assembly at the end of the period covered by this report. The contentious provisions that met with objections from the Protestant community were excluded from the draft law approved by the Kosovo Assembly and would likely be

addressed in subsequent legislation. The most recent draft law enshrined the right to believe and worship freely in Kosovo.

In April 2006, ethnic Albanian President Fatmir Sejdiu visited Decani monastery for Orthodox Easter and spoke in Serbian while conversing with the clergy, marking the first time a president of Kosovo received and accepted such an invitation. Veton Surroi, leader of Reform Party Ora (PRO), visited the SOC's Decani monastery twice during the reporting period, in an effort to hear SOC concerns pertaining to Kosovo's final status negotiations. Central and local government officials participated in a landmark interfaith conference hosted by the Pec Patriarchate from May 2 to May 4, 2006, which included a visit to the Decani monastery, a nearby mosque, and a Roman Catholic church.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

UNMIK, the PISG, and KFOR policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Kosovo Islamic Community at times publicly alleged that Kosovo lacked genuine religious freedom, citing as examples UNMIK's refusal to provide radio frequencies for an Islamic radio station and the closing of a prayer room in the National Library by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in 2004. The same community also alleged that, although thirty-two acres of municipal land were allocated and the cornerstone was laid August 28, 2005, for a Roman Catholic cathedral in Pristina dedicated to Mother Theresa, a Catholic nun of Albanian ethnicity, the Pristina Municipal Assembly refused its request to allocate space for new mosques for what the Islamic community claimed was a growing Muslim population in Pristina. Some Kosovo Muslim leaders complained that they were not consulted prior to registration of foreign Islamic NGOs with UNMIK.

Kosovo education legislation and regulation provide for a separation between religious and public spheres. In May 2005, a principal suspended a public school teacher for wearing a headscarf to class, citing a provision of Kosovo's law on education which obligates public institutions to adopt a neutral attitude towards religion when providing education. On May 29, Pristina Municipality's Department of Education dismissed the teacher, a decision the Ombudsperson's Institution supported when the investigation revealed the teacher was found to have been proselytizing during class time. A male student filed a complaint with the Ombudsperson's Institution alleging he was expelled from school for wearing a beard; school officials told the Ombudsperson Institution that the student was not expelled, but only prevented from returning to class while he wore a beard. Another case from April 2005, which was under investigation at the end of the reporting period, involved a primary school student who was dismissed from class for wearing a headscarf. A similar case resulted in a June 2004 non-binding opinion from the ombudsperson that the ministry's interpretation should only apply to school teachers and officials, not students. All parties filed petitions with the Ministry of Education and formal complaints with Kosovo's ombudsperson.

Protestants continued to report that they experience 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. Decani municipal authorities responded that their donation of time in the shared municipal convention center afforded Protestants adequate space.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On January 17, 2006, the SOC alleged that the Association of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) War Veterans, in cooperation with Gjakova municipality, had erected a monument honoring KLA veterans on church property. On February 2, the SOC announced that UNMIK promised, in cooperation with the PISG, to "work to protect this church property." The monument remained in place 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 of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, Kosovo political leaders—including government and political party officials—increasingly called for religious tolerance and participated in milestone interfaith events. Kosovo officials also constructively en-

gaged in several rounds of U.N.-led negotiations this year with Serbian officials to reach agreement as part of the Kosovo status talks on ways to better protect religious and cultural heritage in Kosovo. Talks were ongoing at the end of the period covered by the report.

During a January 6, 2006, visit to the Serb residents in Pristina on Orthodox Christmas, the then-Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi said that Kosovo was not only his home, but the home of all Kosovo's residents, irrespective of ethnicity and religion.

Serbian Orthodox clergy reported constraints on freedom of movement that prohibited adherents from freely attending worship services, but reported that they themselves were able to move freely around Kosovo with little incident. On March 22, 2006, UNMIK Chief Soren Jessen-Petersen and Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu paid a visit to Rahovec municipality. In two separate meetings with members of Serb and Albanian communities, Sejdiu and Jessen-Petersen called on citizens of Rahovec to work together to achieve full human rights for all Kosovars.

On March 28, 2006, Veton Surroi convened the Communities Consultative Council in Durres, Albania, bringing together political leadership from Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo's other minority communities to openly discuss their ideas for the Kosovo status talks.

On April 19, 2006, the SRSG urged internally displaced persons (IDPs) and IDP associations to participate actively in the ongoing returns efforts. In his meeting with members of IDP associations, the SRSG said that the PISG and UNMIK, in active collaboration with IDP associations and minority groups, had revised the returns manual to ensure direct participation of IDPs themselves in decision-making processes.

One challenge facing the international community and the PISG has been reducing and preventing ethnically motivated attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches and shrines and on the Serbian Orthodox population of Kosovo. Since the riots of March 2004, during which 30 Orthodox religious sites and more than 900 homes and businesses of ethnic minorities were burned or damaged, the number of attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches has decreased. Members of the PISG and some political leaders, who made efforts to communicate with Kosovo Serbs and Serbian Orthodox officials after the riots and during the period covered by this report, continued to express a public commitment to assist in their return and the reconstruction of damaged or destroyed churches.

Prompted by the international community after the March 2004 riots, Kosovo leaders sought to address the concerns of the Serbian Orthodox Church and persons displaced by the violence and agreed to fund and cooperate with local religious officials and international experts in rebuilding the damaged property. On the basis of a Council of Europe damage assessment, the PISG allocated $5.3 million (4.2 million euros) for the initial phase of the reconstruction of churches and monasteries damaged in the March riots. The PISG completed the first phase of emergency repairs in full cooperation with the SOC during the period covered by this report.

In a May 2006 report to the UNSC, UNMIK stated that most of the criminal cases related to March 2004 riots were handled by the local judiciary: Charges were pressed against 426 people, resulting in 217 convictions, 14 acquittals, 89 pending cases, and 106 cases dropped for lack of evidence. International prosecutors conducted forty-four of the most serious riot-related cases, resulting in thirteen convictions, with punishments ranging from suspended sentences to eighteen years in prison for attempted murder.

General crime statistics as reported by UNMIK on May 24, 2006, revealed a decline in potentially ethnically-motivated crimes. Compared to the seventy-two incidents recorded from January to March 2005, nineteen such cases were reported during the same time period in 2006. UNMIK police reported that of the 1,408 Kosovo Serb convoys escorted by the KPS from January to early May 2006, there were only 6 incidents of stone throwing, leading to 5 arrests by the KPS. In response to reports in the Serb media of increasing security concerns among Kosovo Serbs, UNMIK and KPS began twenty-four-hour foot patrols in majority ethnic Serb areas of Kosovo in May 2006.

On May 16, 2006, ethnic Albanian students from a secondary school in Decan municipality, accompanied by the director and four teachers, visited the Decani monastery, marking the first nonofficial visit of ethnic Albanian Kosovo residents to the monastery since the end of the conflict in 1999. Father Sava Janjic welcomed and guided the group through a tour of the site; both sides expressed positive impressions, and Father Sava told the group he would welcome more such visits in the future.

On April 14, 2006, UNMIK, for the third time, renewed a six-month protection zone for 800 hectares surrounding Decani monastery, which prevents commercial development on protected property.

The municipal assembly of Rahovec/Orahovac passed a resolution on June 19, 2006, allowing the monks of Zociste/Zocishte monastery to regularly use their church bell. Until June 19, as directed by German KFOR, the monks rang the bell only for important church holidays.

Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and a large Serbian delegation traveled to Kosovo on June 26–28 to commemorate the 650th anniversary of the death of King Dusan at the Holy Archangels Monastery in Prizren, and the annual Vidovdan commemoration of the defeat of the Serbs and their allies by the Turks in the Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389. The visit, a possible flashpoint, went without incident.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Ethnicity and religion were inextricably linked in Kosovo and made it difficult to determine if societal discrimination and violence were religiously or ethnically motivated. While most Kosovo Albanians identified themselves as Muslim, the designation had more of a cultural than religious connotation. Kosovo Serbs identified themselves with the SOC, which defined not only their religious but also their cultural and historical perspectives. During and after the 1999 conflict, some Serbian Orthodox leaders played a moderating political role, while others withdrew from constructive discussion. Most Kosovo Serb politicians continued their three-year boycott of participation in government institutions.

Societal violence continued and increased marginally from the last reporting period. Three high-profile killings of ethnic Serbs occurred during the reporting period: On August 27, 2005, two young men were fatally shot while driving, and a third was stabbed in March on the flashpoint bridge separating ethnic Serb majority north Mitrovica municipality from ethnic Albanian majority south Mitrovica. The first crime had not been solved, but police authorities reacted quickly to arrest suspects in the second case, one of whom was released and was awaiting trial. On May 6, 2006, Kosovo Serb media reported that unknown attackers shot at a car driven by Serbian Orthodox priest Srjdan Stankovic in Zvecan municipality; UNMIK charged an ethnic Serb Kosovo Police Service officer in connection with the incident for "brandishing a firearm." One other high profile shooting occurred at a gas station; no one had been charged for this incident by the end of the period covered by this report. Although tension between communities remained high, the prevailing crime trend continued to be against property instead of persons. In 2005, however, 57 percent of potential ethnically motivated incidents were assault and intimidation-related, not necessarily property-related offences, as in the previous reporting period. There were some reported incidents of rock-throwing and other assaults against Serbian buses and Serbian Orthodox clergy as they traveled outside of their monasteries, and monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly did not use parts of the monasteries' properties because of concerns about safety.

Security concerns continued to affect the Serb community and also affected its freedom to worship, particularly after the March 2004 riots. Some Kosovo Serbs asserted that they were not able to travel freely to practice their faith. Father Sava Janjic of Decani monastery told USOP that, since KFOR stopped escorting non-clergy parishioners to religious sites in April 2005, he noticed a decline in attendance at services. Sava also reported that, when traveling through Kosovo, clergy transit vans were sometimes pelted with stones and verbal insults, although he and his co-religious generally traveled freely and without incident on Kosovo's main highways during the period covered by this report. Father Sava and Bishop Teodosije (Sibalic) of Lipljan both traveled with an escort to USOP on occasion without incident, including on July 1, 2005, for a Fourth of July celebration. On April 21, 2005, KFOR withdrew its last two armored vehicles from the bridge connecting majority Serb-inhabited north Mitrovica and Kosovo Albanian dominated south Mitrovica and, on April 29, 2005, opened twenty-four-hour passage on the bridge; however, following the stabbing incident near the northern side of the bridge, civilian passage was again temporarily halted. KFOR maintained a nearby presence.

Problems at Serbian Orthodox religious sites continued during the period covered by this report, such as an abundance of garbage at a cemetery near the Pec/Peja Patriarchate. Local Serb radio reported on May 12, 2006, that unknown attackers broke newly fitted doors and several new windows added to the SOC's Church of Saint Ilija, in Podujeve/Podujevo municipality, by the PISG as part of the renovation of March 2004 riot-related damage. The SOC told the media that unknown attackers vandalized the Church of the Birth of the Mother of God (Theotokos) in

Obiliq/Obilic on June 19, 2006, by taking at least two crosses from the church's domes and a portion of the lead roof. This church was built in 1998, damaged in the March 2004 riots, and placed on the list of sites to be reconstructed using money from the PISG.

The Kosovo Police Service reported on June 20, 2006, that unknown attackers vandalized sixteen tombstones in a Serbian Orthodox cemetery located in the ethnic Serb majority village of Staro Gracko/Starogracke in Lipljan municipality. KFOR had reportedly cordoned off the cemetery on June 9 when visitors discovered a landmine there. Investigations were ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. On June 21, Serb media reported that the Serbian Orthodox Church of St. Andrew in Podujeve/Podujevo municipality was vandalized as well.

Many of the churches and monasteries burned in the March 2004 riots were constructed in the 14th century and are considered part of Kosovo's cultural and religious heritage. Father Sava Janjic provided a comprehensive list of religious sites destroyed or damaged between March 17 and 19, 2004. The list included thirty sites altogether in the following fourteen locations: Prizren, Rahovec, Gjakova, Skenderaj, Peja, Ferizaj, Kamenica, Shtime, Pristina, Fushe Kosove, Vushtrri, Obiliq, Mitrovica, and Podujevo.

Individual donor countries began repairs to several of the seventy-five priority cultural and religious monuments identified at the May 13, 2005, donors' conference in Paris.

In addition, problems continued with the unfinished Serbian Church of Christ the Savior (only the exterior walls stood), located on University of Pristina grounds. During the 1990s, the Serb-dominated administration in Pristina gave the land on which the church sits to the SOC. In 2003, the Pristina Municipal Assembly passed a resolution to return the land to the university. The UNMIK representative in the Pristina municipal government immediately suspended this decision. In February 2005, a Christian cross attached to the church was damaged. The SRSG recommended that Pristina authorities abandon their September proposal to convert the unfinished church into an entertainment venue, such as a movie theater or an art gallery.

In light of societal violence in Kosovo against properties owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian Orthodox religious symbols, UNMIK authorities continued to provide special security measures to protect religious sites and to ensure that members of all religious groups could worship safely. KFOR deployed security contingents at religious sites throughout Kosovo to protect them from further destruction, such as that which had occurred immediately after KFOR's intervention in 1999; however, KFOR gave priority to saving persons' lives rather than property and was unable to stop the burning and destruction of many sites in March 2004. Because of improving security conditions and decreasing interethnic tensions in some areas, KFOR removed static checkpoints from most churches and religious sites, including relaxing checkpoints at Decani monastery, during the period covered by this report, relying instead on patrols by the U.N. international police (CIVPOL) and indigenous Kosovo Police Service (KPS). In most cases, such changes in security measures did not result in a change in the level of safety of, or access to, the religious sites. During the March 2004 riots, KFOR, CIVPOL, and KPS were involved in crowd control and protecting lives and property. The priority was evacuating persons over saving property, even religious property. Immediately following the March riots, the process of transfer of jurisdiction over local police stations from KFOR to CIVPOL and KPS was halted; subsequently, transfer continued, and all thirty-two jurisdictions in Kosovo were under local KPS patrol at the end of the period covered by this report.

Although Protestants previously reported a slight improvement in their situation, they reported suffering more violence and discrimination during the period covered by this report. They reported 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. They also stated that, while public television station RTK as an institution did not specifically report on the Protestant religion, some individuals within the RTK had a more positive approach. Protestants also reported slight discrimination in schools where school officials occasionally called in parents of pupils to deter their children from being Protestant. Protestants reported that a U.S. citizen pastor was beaten in Decani municipality by a young man opposed to the Protestants' building of a church there. Protestants also reported verbal local opposition to showing a Christian-based movie in villages throughout Kosovo, as well as break-ins at churches and harassment of adherents.

Roman Catholic leaders reported that they had good relations with the Muslim community but hardly any bilateral contact with the Serbian Orthodox Church lead-

ership. Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox church leadership believed each other to be highly politicized. The Muslim community made similar remarks concerning their relationship with the Roman Catholic leadership and lack of relationship with the Orthodox community. On May 3, 2006, thieves stole thirteen religious paintings from a Catholic church in Letnica village, which was inhabited by ethnic Albanian and Croats. The Pec/Peja Patriarchate hosted Kosovo's first interfaith conference in two years from May 2 to 4, 2006. Participants from Islamic, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant religious communities, diplomatic liaison offices, UNMIK, and members of the PISG's central and local governance structures discussed religious freedom; visited a Roman Catholic church, a mosque, and Peja/Pec's Orthodox church, accompanied by regional municipal leadership; visited Decani monastery; and, accompanied by ethnic Albanian Decan/Decani mayor Nazmi Selmanaj, walked together to the mosque in the city center. The common statement released by the religious leaders committed the group to hold regular meetings to intensify interreligious dialogue and cooperation, to promote the returns process of all displaced persons, and to engage in the process of drafting religious freedom legislation. Norwegian Church Aid hosted the May 2006 conference to promote peace and dialogue among religious groups. The Islamic community offered to host the next meeting in October 2006.

The withdrawal of Former Republic of Yugoslavia and Serbian troops from Kosovo in 1999 and establishment of UNMIK administration through UNSCR 1244 resulted in an improved situation for the majority, largely Muslim, ethnic Albanian population, and a cessation of attacks on their mosques and religious sites.

Islamic, some local Orthodox, and Roman Catholic leaders have attempted to encourage tolerance and peace in Kosovo, in both the religious and political spheres.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the U.N. Special Envoy for the Kosovo status talks, UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo as part of its overall policy to promote human rights, and has sought to promote ethnic and religious tolerance in Kosovo. U.S. officials also maintained close contacts and met regularly with religious leaders of the Serbian Orthodox, Islamic, Roman Catholic, and Protestant communities to discuss their concerns and to push for interfaith dialogue. A delegation of Serbian Orthodox officials formally visited U.S. Government institutions in the United States from March 15 to 22, 2006.

U.S. officials continued to urge dialogue between members of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo and ethnic Albanian members of the PISG. Officials from the United States met frequently with the heads of major religious communities. In contrast to previous reporting periods, United States Office Pristina personnel attended Serbian Orthodox holiday services. U.S. officials continued to support UNMIK and the PISG in rebuilding religious buildings damaged in the interethnic riots of March 2004. Officials from the United States met frequently with the heads of the major religious communities, provided funding to preserve Ottoman-era transcripts in the Gazi Medhmed Pasha library, and granted $1 million to UNESCO's large-scale effort to preserve cultural heritage in the country.

The United States is involved actively in 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.

U.S. KFOR peacekeeping troops worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo and guarded religious sites. U.S. KFOR was credited by local SOC officials with preventing the situation from further escalation in their sector during the March 2004 riots, and they increased their presence within the sector they patrol.

The U.S. Government funded the remainder of a survey of Islamic manuscripts in Kosovo to help the local Islamic community preserve its religious heritage.

The U.S. Department of State funds a U.N. international police (CIVPOL) advisor in Pristina and provided $40 million (31.86 million euros) to support KPS and CIVPOL. KPS and CIVPOL have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in the country.

The U.S. Department of State provides $3.5 million in funding for returns programs for Muslim and Orthodox Roma, Orthodox Serbs, Muslim Bosnians, and other minority communities.

In the wake of the March 2004 interethnic violence, U.S. officers met with Islamic, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic authorities to discuss ways of supporting reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. Many high-level U.S. Government and military officials continued to visit the country in conjunction with the final status negotiation process and meet with both political and religious leaders to assess the situation and urge reconstruction and progress toward a multiethnic Kosovo. The U.S.

Office also urged the Government to reconstruct Serb homes quickly and allow UNESCO to take the lead on reconstruction of destroyed and damaged religious sites in the country.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, anti-Semitism persisted among some elements of the population.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 18,859 square miles and a population of 5,396,193. According to the 2001 census, the number of persons who claimed a religious affiliation increased from 72.8 percent in 1991 to 84.1 percent in 2001. This increase may 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 were 3,708,120 Roman Catholics (68.9 percent of the population); 372,858 Augsburg Lutherans (6.9 percent); 219,831 Byzantine Catholics (4.1 percent); 109,735 members of the Reformed Christian Church (2 percent); 50,363 Orthodox Christians (.9 percent); and 20,630 members of Jehovah's Witnesses. There were 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. According to the 2001 census, 13 percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation, and 3.5 percent were undecided. There were also some Muslims living in the country, primarily immigrants from Middle Eastern countries, international students, or Albanian immigrants. Estimates of the Muslim population varied from 300 to 3,000.

There were three categories of nonregistered religions that comprised approximately thirty groups: Nontraditional religions, 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, Movement of the Holy Grail, and the Baha'i Faith; and Christian 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, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Free Peoples' Mission, Presbyterian Church Emmanuel, and Brothers in Christ (Christadelphians).

The number of immigrants was statistically insignificant. There were very small numbers of refugees and migrants who practiced faiths different from those of the majority of native-born citizens. Missionaries do not register with the Government, and no official statistics existed, although, according to government information, there were missionaries from Roman Catholic, Augsburg Lutheran, and Methodist religious groups, as well as a Jewish emissary, active in the country. Among the nonregistered churches, there were a significant number of Mormon missionaries.

There was some correlation between religious differences and ethnic or political differences. The Christian Democratic Party (KDH), which had ties to the Catholic faith, was the only political party with an explicitly religious agenda. The Slovak Democratic Christian Union (SDKU) was a Christian democratic party similar to those found in many western European countries. The Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) also had a Christian wing.

Followers of the Orthodox Church lived predominantly in the eastern part of the country. The Ruthenian minority were typically adherents to the Orthodox faith. The Reformed Christian Church existed primarily in the south, near the border with

Hungary, where many ethnic Hungarians lived. Other religious groups tended to be spread evenly throughout the country.

According to polling data, the number of religious practitioners continued to increase after the fall of communism, and 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 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. It 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. The Catholic Church receives significantly larger government subsidies because of the higher percentage of Catholics in the country. In 2001, the Government signed an international treaty with the Vatican, which provides the legal framework for relations between the country's Catholic Church, the Government, and the Vatican. Four corollaries to the framework treaty were proposed. In 2002, the Government signed an agreement with eleven other registered religious groups in an attempt to counterbalance the Vatican agreement and provide equal status to the remaining registered religious groups. This agreement is subordinate to national law and subject to amendment by statute; the Vatican treaty, as an international agreement, can be amended only through international legal mechanisms.

In 2002, the Government approved one of the corollaries regarding military service in the chaplaincy for priests. In 2003, the president signed a second corollary regarding religious education, which was approved by Parliament in January 2004. An identical agreement was signed with eleven other registered religious groups. This treaty mandates that all public elementary schools require children to take either a religion class or an ethics class, depending on their (or their parents') preference. This was previously required only for students in the fifth through ninth grades. Private schools affiliated with a particular religion do not need to provide classes in other religions. These courses were often taught by religious leaders, and the religious groups were responsible for providing instructors, although their salaries were paid from the government budget. There was a lack of qualified teachers for certain religions. Some representatives of religious groups complained that the status of religious lecturers was not equal to that of regular teachers. Religious lecturers were usually hired on contract and were not paid during the two-month summer vacation. There was some concern about possible ostracism of student members of smaller religious groups, who might be one of a small group requesting the class, especially in smaller municipalities. Despite these resource concerns, smaller churches reiterated that they were generally pleased with the system.

The remaining two corollaries to the Vatican treaty, including a proposal to allow employees to refuse to perform certain job requirements on religious grounds, were not passed into law during the period covered by this report. The so-called "conscientious objector treaty" was turned into a draft law that was widely debated in society and political circles, but was not forwarded to the cabinet for a vote on adoption.

Registration of religious groups is not required; however, under existing law, only registered religious groups have the explicit right to conduct public worship services and other activities, although no specific religions or practices are banned or discouraged by the authorities in practice. Those that register receive government benefits, including subsidies for clergymen, office expenses, the right to visit and proselytize in prisons and hospitals, and access to public television broadcasting. Government funding also is provided to religious schools and to teachers who lecture on religion in state schools. The Government occasionally subsidizes one-time projects and significant religious activities, and registered religious groups are part-

ly exempt from paying taxes and import custom fees. A religion may elect not to accept the subsidies.

During the period covered by this report, there were sixteen registered religious groups in the country. The last group to successfully register was the Apostolic Church in 2001. Because of the high membership requirement, no new religious groups have filed for registration since then.

To register a new religion, a group must submit a list of 20,000 permanent residents who adhere to that religion. Fourteen of the religious groups already established before the law passed in 1991 were exempt from this membership requirement. Although the Nazarene and the Muslim communities existed in the country prior to 1991, they were never properly registered and, therefore, were not given registered status under the 1991 law. Two additional religious groups have been allowed to register since 1991: The Jehovah's Witnesses and the New Apostolic Church. Leaders of a number of minority religious communities, in particular Muslims, smaller Protestant churches, the Hare Krishna community, and the Church of Scientology, have in previous years complained that the membership requirements effectively barred them from obtaining registered status. Nonregistered religious groups may not build public places of worship or conduct legally valid religious ceremonies such as weddings. In 2000, the Muslim community in Bratislava purchased a plot of land with the hope of building an Islamic center. While they previously speculated that municipal officials were denying them permission for the construction, it appears that financial problems, zoning questions, and a lack of identifiable leadership in the Muslim community could have also affected the construction delay. Several of Bratislava's Muslims also criticized the registration law, noting that the community in the Czech Republic was able to submit an application for first-tier registration under Czech law with only 300 or more citizen member signatures. The Ministry of Culture was aware of the registration controversy.

Because the law on registration of religious groups does not provide for registration of nontheistic groups, the Department of Church Affairs suggested that an atheist group that had made inquiries into obtaining registration might find funding from the Department of Minority Culture.

There are no specific licensing or registration requirements for foreign missionaries or religious organizations. The law allows all religious groups to send out their representatives, as well as to receive foreign missionaries, without limitation. Missionaries neither need special permission to stay in the country, nor are their activities regulated in any way.

Joint education projects on Jewish history and culture for elementary and high school teachers were successful and well received. In November 2005, the Government was accepted as a full member in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The Ministry of Education organized a January 2006 international seminar in Bratislava on "Teaching and Remembering the Holocaust," together with the International School of the Holocaust at the Yad Vashem Museum, the Council of Europe, and the Holocaust Documentation Center. In March 2006, two seminars were held at the Terezin Memorial, with eighty teachers attending; that same month, twenty Slovak teachers took part in a seminar at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Museum entitled "Teaching about the Holocaust." In 2005, two teachers participated in a seminar at the Florida Holocaust Museum. The Ministry of Education jointly organized a seminar in July 2005 on the history of Judaism and the Holocaust in southern Slovakia.

Several Slovak schools received grants from the Anne Frank House, and a school in Sered initiated a project to restore the local Jewish cemetery. It also created an exhibit about Judaism in the country, despite the complete decimation of the city's Jewish community in the first half of the twentieth century, at which time the city hosted one of the country's three labor camps for Jews awaiting deportation. In 2004, teachers continued to visit U.S. universities to participate in summer training programs; twenty-five Slovak teachers visited the concentration camp in Dachau, and twenty teachers traveled to Terezin for training on Holocaust education in the Czech Republic. To assist teachers with instruction about the Holocaust, the Ministry of Education published a textbook, "Why We Learn about the Holocaust," during the reporting period, and distributed it to four teacher-training centers. In 2003, a Holocaust Documentation Center was established as a joint project of the Bratislava Jewish community and the Milan Simecka Foundation; after May 2005, the Union of Jewish Communities and the Simecka Foundation took over its administration. It has released several publications dealing with the Holocaust in the country, Jewish wartime history, and memoirs of Jewish personalities. In August 2005, President Ivan Gasparovic participated in the inauguration of an exhibit on "The Fate of Slovak Jews" at a refurbished synagogue in Nitra.

The Institute for Church-State Relations also organized two conferences, including one on "Islam in Europe" in November 2005, and another titled "Western Muslim Culture—Implications for Slovakia" in March 2006.

In 2005, the Institute for National Memory began publishing on the Internet the names of Slovaks who organized the "aryanization" of Jewish property during World War II. The project was met with controversy, as the Institute planned to release the names of Slovaks who benefited from "aryanization."

There are several religious holy days that are celebrated as national holidays, including Epiphany, the Day of the Virgin Mary of the Seven Sorrows, All Saints' Day, St. Stephen's Day, Christmas, and Easter. A treaty with the Vatican prohibits the removal or alteration of existing religious holidays considered as state holidays.

The Department of Church Affairs at the Ministry of Culture oversees relations between religious groups and the state and manages the distribution of state subsidies to religious groups and associations. However, the ministry cannot intervene in the internal affairs of religious groups and does not direct their activities. The ministry administers a cultural state fund, "Let's Renew Our House," which allocates money for the upkeep of cultural and religious monuments.

Since 1989, the Government has promoted interfaith dialogue and understanding by supporting events organized by various religious groups. The state-supported Ecumenical Council of Churches promotes communication within the religious community. Most Christian churches have the status of members or observers in the Council. The Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic (UZZNO) was invited and participates in its activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rather than as religious groups. Such groups included Scientologists 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. Law 282/93 on the Restitution of Communal Property enabled all religious groups to apply for the return of their property confiscated by the communist government. The deadline for these claims was December 31, 1994. The property was returned in its existing condition, and the Government did not provide any compensation for the damage done to it during the previous regime. The property was returned by the Government, municipalities, state legal entities, and, under certain conditions, by private persons. In some cases, the property was returned legally by the Government, but it was not vacated by the former tenant, often a school or hospital with nowhere else to go.

There were also problems with the return of property that was undeveloped at the time of seizure but was subsequently developed. Churches, synagogues, and cemeteries have been returned, albeit mostly in poor condition. Religious groups often lacked the funds to restore these properties to a usable condition. The main obstacles to the resolution of outstanding restitution claims were the Government's lack of financial resources, due to its austerity program, and bureaucratic resistance on the part of those entities required to vacate restitutable properties. The Reformed Christian Church was vocal regarding its unfulfilled restitution claims. According to their representatives, the new restitution law that went into effect in May 2005 addressed some complex property claims, but did not resolve the cases of approximately seventy 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 Church existed primarily in poorer areas of the country where there was little money for restoration and consequently was seeking funds from abroad during the period covered by this report.

The Orthodox Church reported that all of its claims for restitution have been settled, while the Catholic Church reported that more than half of the property that it had claimed had been returned. In another 12 percent of cases, the property had

been returned legally to the Church, but typically was occupied by other tenants and would require court action to be returned to church hands. The Church had not received any compensation for the remaining 40 percent of claims, since these properties were undeveloped at the time of nationalization but were developed later. The Church also is not eligible to reacquire lands that originally were registered to church foundations that no longer exist or no longer operate in the country, such as the Benedictines.

In 2004, the Bratislava City Government proposed to evict the state-run Jewish Museum from its current location unless it paid a higher, market-rate rent rather than the nominal rate that it was paying. The museum responded that it did not have the funds to pay the higher rent. Jewish community leaders suggested that the city owed some consideration to them since it owned many other buildings that once belonged to Jewish Holocaust victims. While this building was not among them, it was occupied by many who also perished in the concentration camps. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were no new developments.

Following two years of negotiations, the deputy prime minister's office drafted a proposal of compensation for heirless property owned by Jewish families before the Holocaust. In 2002, the Cabinet agreed to $18,747,253 (SKK 850 million) in compensation for this property. The entire amount was placed into an account at the Slovak National Bank, and one-third was made available immediately as needed because of the advancing age of Holocaust survivors. The Jewish community would draw interest on the account for ten years before receiving the remaining principal. The community intended to use the funds to compensate some community members as well as to fund social, educational, and cultural programs.

UZZNO has filed a lawsuit against Germany to reclaim compensation for monies paid by the wartime Slovak Government to Germany to cover the cost of Germany's deportation of 57,000 members of the country's Jewish population. UZZNO lost the lawsuit in 2003 and immediately appealed; the case was still pending 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.

Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism persisted among some elements of society, manifested occasionally in incidences of violence and vandalism. According to estimates, 500 to 800 neo-Nazis and 3,000 to 5,000 sympathizers operated in the country and committed serious offenses; however, only a small number of these 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 three years. In May 2005, police broke up a skinhead concert in the northern part of the country. Legislation is similar to that of neighboring countries, but court delays prevented comparable improvements in the situation. Religious minorities had not yet needed to avail themselves of protections provided by a new anti-discrimination law passed in 2004.

In October 2005, the town of Topolcany issued a public apology to former Jewish residents forced out by a pogrom in September 1945, in which forty-eight Jews were badly injured. A documentary film about the pogrom was widely viewed when it aired on Slovak television in 2005.

The nationalist group Slovenska Pospolitost, whose members frequently dress in black uniforms similar to those of the fascist Hlinka Guards (who identified and sent Jewish persons to the concentration camps during World War II), undertook several actions during the reporting period and clashed with police forces at several marches. The Ministry of the Interior stripped Slovenska Pospolitost of its status as a political party in 2006, in advance of parliamentary elections. However, the group's leadership cooperated with other nationalist political parties to get themselves on the ballot for the elections. Slovenska Pospolitost remained a registered NGO, although this status was in dispute.

The low number of prosecutions for racially motivated crime generally improved over the past three years because of the creation of a specialized police unit, an advisor in the Bratislava Regional Police, and increased training. Their successes included the investigation of 121 persons in 2005, 82 of whom were formally charged with supporting ideas or movements that suppressed the rights of others, including the leader of Slovenska Pospolitost, who taught high school in Banska Bystrica. In another 2004 success, the Bratislava Police checked 158 suspected meeting places

of extremist groups in an overnight raid that resulted in 14 arrests. Because of the monitoring unit and its NGO advisory board, the police were better trained in identifying neo-Nazi members and more informed about their activities. The minister of the interior had an advisor on racially motivated crime who participated actively on the Government's advisory commission with NGOs. The Ministry of Interior assigned specialists on hate crimes to each of the country's eight regions.

Meetings and demonstrations to commemorate the anniversary of the first Slovak state from World War II occur each year throughout the country. At these and other events, extremists frequently appear in the uniforms of the Hlinka guards. In March 2005, 200 persons dressed in Hlinka guard uniforms marched through Bratislava to commemorate the anniversary of the establishment of the Fascist Slovak state in 1939. Jewish community groups complained that the Government had not done enough to investigate and identify the benefactors of this group.

In 2005, a publication by the cultural organization Matica Slovenska questioned the scope and nature of the Holocaust, suggesting that the deportation of the country's Jewish population to concentration camps was simply part of a "resettlement program."

A Jewish cemetery was desecrated during the period covered by this report. In April 2006, unknown culprits placed three posters of Hitler with eagles and swastikas at a monument to Jewish Holocaust victims in Rimavska Sobota. It was previously vandalized in July 2005, when it was both damaged and covered in graffiti claiming that the Holocaust was a lie. A week earlier, five tombstones were destroyed in a Jewish cemetery in Rimavska Sec. An UZZNO official claimed that the cases appeared to be simple vandalism, but racial motivation could not be ruled out, and some NGOs believed the vandalism may be more organized. Vandals regularly spray-painted anti-Semitic slogans and toppled or broke gravestones. In most cases, police caught adolescent perpetrators, who were sentenced to pay at least part of the cost of the repairs. Jewish community leaders stated they were satisfied with the Government's response to these incidents, and they did not believe that the communities supported this vandalism. In one notable sentencing that occurred in 2004, a judge sentenced vandals to unconditional jail sentences, which the Jewish community believed sent a needed message to the community. In January 2005, juveniles vandalized nineteen tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Ruzemberok; an investigation into the incident was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. In June 2005, vandals broke a pane of glass at Bratislava's memorial to Rabbi Chatam Sofer. In July 2005, derogatory inscriptions, such as "The Holocaust is a lie," were painted and carved on the new Holocaust Memorial in Rimavska Sec; the investigation concluded without charges being filed. Vandals destroyed five tombstones and damaged another two at Rimavska Sobota's Jewish cemetery the following week; the investigation concluded with no suspects.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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. The embassy encouraged tolerance for minority religious groups. Embassy officers and official visitors met with officials of major and minor religious groups on a regular basis to discuss property restitution issues as well as human rights conditions and religious freedom.

The embassy continued its dialogue with the Conference of Bishops, the Federation of Jewish Communities, and the Orthodox Church. 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 this successful project.

The embassy hosted several roundtable discussions and representational events focusing on the need for the country to lower its numerical threshold for religious

registration to better correspond with OSCE standards. The embassy publicly expressed U.S. opposition to the numerical threshold, and the ambassador raised the issue with the minister of culture.

The embassy also hosted a series of events focusing on relations with the Muslim community, which continues to face difficulties organizing and constructing a mosque in the country, in some part because of local bias. Embassy officers often made tolerance and diversity the subject of speeches during outreach trips.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 7,827 square miles and a population of approximately 1,964,000. Estimates of religious identification varied. According to the 2002 census, the numbers were: Roman Catholic, 1,135,626; Evangelical, 14,736; other Protestant, 1,399; Orthodox, 45,908; other Christian, 1,877; Muslim, 47,488; Jewish, 99; Oriental, 1,026; other religion, 558; agnostic, 271; believer, but belonging to no religion, 68,714; unbeliever/atheist, 199,264; no reply, 307,973; and unknown, 139,097.

The Orthodox and Muslim populations appeared to correspond to the country's immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively. These groups tended to have a lower socioeconomic status in society.

Foreign missionaries, including a mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and other religious groups (including Hare Krishna, Church of Scientology, and the Unification Church), 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.

There were no formal requirements for recognition as a religion by the Government. Religious communities must register with the Government's Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be legal entities, and registration entitles such groups to rebates on value-added taxes. During the reporting period, there were forty-one religious communities officially registered, up from forty in 2005 and thirty-six in 2003. Four cases remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Registered religious groups, including foreign missionaries, may receive value-added tax rebates on a quarterly basis from the Ministry of Finance. All groups reported equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

In 2004, several political parties proposed that religious instruction be made compulsory; however, the Ministry of Education rejected the initiative on the basis of existing legislation. The constitution states that parents are entitled to give their children "a moral and religious upbringing." Only those schools that were supported by religious bodies taught religion.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, it has been government policy since 1991 to pay the share of social insurance contribution for clergy and other full time religious workers that is normally paid by an employer.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

After independence in 1991, Parliament passed legislation calling for denationalization (with restitution or compensation) within a fixed period of church properties—church buildings and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests—that were nationalized after World War II by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugo-

slavia. By March 31, 2006, the Government had adjudicated 35,241 (92 percent) of the 38,306 denationalization claims filed. In 2004, the Government reallocated existing resources to reduce the backlog in cases, effectively quickening the pace of resolution.

The Roman Catholic Church was a major property holder in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II. After the war, much church property was confiscated and nationalized by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Despite the Catholic Church's numerical predominance, restitution of its property remained a politically unpopular issue. By October 31, 2005, the Government had adjudicated 61.8 percent of claims filed by the Roman Catholic Church and had compensated or returned $170 million (135.1 million euros) worth of property. The total value of all property and compensation being claimed by the Roman Catholic Church was $293 million (233.2 million euros).

Many Jewish communal and heirless properties were also either confiscated or nationalized during and after World War II. To date, there has been no restitution for these losses. In 2005, the Ministry of Justice created a new Department for Restitution and National Reconciliation to study the issue of private property restitution and compile an inventory of Jewish private properties nationalized or confiscated after World War II. The Government was to issue a tender for this project in June 2006, and research was expected to begin by the fall of 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

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

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 1946–1948. Many of the so-called collaborators were successful businessmen whose assets were confiscated after they were killed or driven from the country, and many were also prominent Catholics. After independence, right-of-center political groups called for a purge of communist government and business officials, but this call was quickly replaced by one for reconciliation.

Interfaith relations were generally amicable in the period covered by this report, although there was little warmth between the majority Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups that were viewed as aggressive proselytizers. Societal attitudes toward the minority Jewish, Muslim, and Serb Orthodox communities generally were tolerant; however, some persons feared the possible emergence of Muslim fundamentalism. While there were no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom of worship, services were commonly held in private homes under cramped conditions because of the lack of mosques.

The Muslim community had long been planning to build a mosque in the capital of Ljubljana. The absence of a mosque was due, in part, to a lack of organization in the Muslim community and to complex legislation and bureaucracy in construction and land regulations. In 2004, a locally organized referendum campaign sought to prevent the Muslim community from building a mosque in Ljubljana, but the plans to hold a referendum were struck down by the Constitutional Court before the referendum could be held. In 2005, plans for building the mosque were stalled in part because of the discovery that part of the land that the city had identified for sale to the Muslim community was subject to a denationalization claim by the Catholic Church. The Church agreed to forgo its claim if compensated by the city. At the end of the period covered by this report, city authorities were set to vote on a budgetary appropriation to provide compensation to the Church and clear the land for sale to the Muslim community.

In early October 2004, a Jewish family grave was desecrated; police had not identified the perpetrators by the end of the period covered by this report. Such acts were extremely rare. However, Jewish community representatives reported some prejudice, ignorance, false stereotypes, and negative images of Jews within society.

The Government promoted tolerance and anti-bias education through its programs in primary and secondary schools. The Holocaust is an obligatory topic in the con-

temporary history curriculum; however, teachers had a great deal of latitude in deciding how much time to devote to it. The country formally joined in the Council of Europe's 2004 proclamation of May 9 as Holocaust Memorial Day. Schools carried out various activities to remember the Holocaust on May 9, for example, watching documentaries, writing assignments, and holding discussions on the topic.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy held extensive discussions with the Government on the topic of property denationalization and restitution for heirless and communal Jewish properties confiscated or nationalized after World War II. In addition, the embassy has made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project. The embassy meets with members of all major religious communities, representatives of nongovernmental organizations that address religious freedom issues, and government officials from relevant offices and ministries.

SPAIN

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationships among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 194,897 square miles, and a population of approximately 43 million.

The law prohibits the collection of census data based on religious belief, which limited the ability to compile statistical data on the number of adherents in the country. The Center for Sociological Investigation (CIS), an independent government agency, collected statistics on religious trends in the society. In February 2006, a CIS survey reported that 77 percent of citizens considered themselves Catholic; however, 46 percent of those persons stated that they never attended Mass. In addition, 13 percent of Spaniards considered themselves agnostics, 6 percent atheists, and approximately 2 percent said that they practiced other religions.

An April 2006 survey by the Santa Maria Foundation reported that, for the first time, less than half of Spaniards between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four described themselves as practicing or nonpracticing Catholics. In a similar 1996 survey of Spanish young persons, 77 percent of respondents described themselves as Catholic. Forty-six percent declared that they were agnostic, atheist, or indifferent to religion.

The Episcopal Conference of Spain (CEE) estimated that there were approximately 34 million Catholics in the country. The Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) stated that it represented 400,000 evangelical Christians and other Protestants and estimated that 30 percent of its members were immigrants from Latin America and Africa. FEREDE also estimated that there were 800,000 foreign Protestants, mostly European, who lived in the country at least six months of each year. There was little comprehensive information on the size of the Muslim community in the country; estimates ranged from 700,000 to 1,500,000. The Federation of Spanish Islamic Entities (FEERI) estimated that there were more than one million Muslims, including both legal and illegal immigrants. Recent government estimates supported local source reports that there were 30,000 to 40,000 Jews in the country. There were approximately 9,000 practicing Buddhists.

The majority of Muslims were recent immigrants from Morocco, but there were 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. There were 386,958 Moroccans living in the country legally and as many as 120,000 illegal Moroccan immigrants.

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. The last government census, taken in 2002, indicated that the largest communities of immigrants from predominantly Islamic countries were located in the autonomous communities of Catalonia, Andalucia, Madrid, Valencia, Murcia, and the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The population of Orthodox Christian communities was largest in Aragon and Valencia. The country also hosted a number of foreign missionaries of evangelical Christian, Mormon, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Islamic faiths.

In January 2005, the MOJ's Register of Religious Entities listed 12,453 entities created by the Catholic Church. There were 1,388 non-Catholic churches, denominations, and communities in the register, including 1,064 Protestant church entities. Protestant entities included 305 charismatic churches, 128 Assemblies of Brethren, 228 Baptist churches, 125 Pentecostal churches, 38 Presbyterian churches, one Evangelical Church of Philadelphia, 10 Church of Christ churches, 1 Salvation Army entity, 18 Anglican churches, 63 interdenominational churches, 35 Churches for Foreigners, 4 Seventh-day Adventist churches, 3 Reformed Adventist churches, and 121 other evangelical churches. In addition, there were also 10 Orthodox churches, 1 Jehovah's Witnesses entity, 1 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 1 Unification Church, 10 entities of other Christian confessions, 16 entities of Judaism, 254 entities of Islam, 11 entities of the Baha'i Faith, 3 entities of Hinduism, 21 entities of Buddhism, and 3 entities of other confessions. The Church of Scientology was 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 could have been much larger. Some religious groups chose to register as cultural organizations with the regional governments rather than with the National Registry of Religious Entities in Madrid because the national registration process could take up to six months and required much paperwork.

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. Discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs is illegal.

Article 16 of the constitution provides for religious freedom and the freedom of worship by individuals and groups. It also states, "No faith shall have the character of a state religion." However, the Government provides certain public financing benefits to the Catholic Church that are not available to other religious entities in practice. These benefits derive from four accords signed with the Holy See in 1979. They cover economic, religious education, military, and judicial matters. The Catholic Church receives financing through voluntary tax contributions and direct payments. Taxpayers can select a box on their income tax forms to contribute up to 0.5 percent of their taxes to the Catholic Church. In 2004, taxpayers contributed approximately $128 million (105.9 million euros) to the Catholic Church. In addition to voluntary taxpayer contributions, the Government provided the Catholic Church an additional $40 million (32.8 million euros). This sum did not include state funding for religion teachers in public schools, military and hospital chaplains, and other indirect assistance.

Representatives of Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic faiths signed bilateral agreements with the Government in 1992. 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 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 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2003; however, the church has not negotiated

a bilateral agreement with the Government. Jehovah's Witnesses and the MOJ both reported in early 2006 that they were working to establish the same status for the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Beginning in 2005, a new government-funded Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence, based in the MOJ, provided funds directly to the minority religion confessions in order to promote religious equality and dialogue among religious groups. The funds, $3.6 million (three million euros) in 2005, are used for activities not themselves religious, that is, for cultural, educational, and social integration programs. 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 and 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 a negative effect on other religious groups. In the 1992 cooperation accords with the FCIE and CIE, the Government agreed to recognize Jewish and Muslim holidays. The 1992 accord with FEREDE accommodates Protestant entities, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, that celebrate Saturday as the Sabbath by giving them Friday afternoon off from work with pay to prepare for the Sabbath.

The Law of Religious Freedom of 1980 implements the constitutional provision for freedom of religion. The 1980 law establishes a legal regime and certain privileges for religious organizations. To enjoy the benefits of this regime, religious organizations must be entered in the Register of Religious Entities maintained by the MOJ Office of Religious Affairs, which is 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 are treated as cultural associations.

The Church of Scientology has been refused registration as a religious entity in the country since it first applied in 1983. The decision to deny registration was upheld by a Supreme Court decision in 1990. An organization claiming to be affiliated with the Church of Scientology filed an application to register with the MOJ in 1983. The MOJ also rejected this application. Following a 2001 decision by the Constitutional Court to register the Unification Church, and following the opening of a new national Church of Scientology of Spain, the Church of Scientology filed an application again in October 2004. However, the Government denied the application in May 2005 and declined to register the Church of Scientology on the grounds that the MOJ did not have the authority to overturn the 1990 decision of the Supreme Court through an administrative action. The Church of Scientology filed a Notice of Appeal to this denial.

Officials of the Church of Scientology argued that the organization that filed the 1983 application was not affiliated with the Church of Scientology. They also argued that the 1990 decision was based on provisions of law, overturned in a 2001 Constitutional Court decision, that a religion must worship a supreme being. Church officials argued that, under the decision of the Constitutional Court, the Church should be registered. MOJ officials held that the 2001 decision applied only to the Unification Church, and that the Church of Scientology must pursue the case through the court system. The Office of Religious Affairs found that the Church of Scientology held the same doctrine, organizational structure, and leadership as the organization that applied in 1983 and was denied registration at that time. Authorities declared that the Government would not interfere in any way with the activities of the Church of Scientology.

The first section of the Register of Religious Entities, called the "special section," contains a list of religious entities created by the Catholic Church and a list of non-Catholic churches, denominations, and communities that have an agreement on cooperation with the state. Catholic dioceses and parishes are not required to register to gain benefits under the 1980 law. However, Catholic monasteries, religious communities, associations, and foundations may voluntarily register to participate in the legal regime.

In 2004, leaders of the Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish communities discussed the issue of expanded tax benefits and public funding, the opening of new places of wor-

ship, 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. All religious minority groups requested the Government to revise the national income tax form to allow taxpayers the option to donate a percentage of their taxes to non-Catholic entities. However, these negotiations ended without an agreement between the Government and religious leaders.

In general, the Government 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.

Muslim and Protestant leaders also have called for the Government to provide more support for public religious education in their respective faiths. In 2004, the Government responded to these calls by approving legislation that provides funding for teachers of courses in Catholic, Islamic, evangelical/Christian, and Judaic studies in public school when at least ten students request them. These 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.

In 2004, the Government set aside funds to pay for twenty Muslim teachers to teach courses on Islam to public school students. The Government required that the teachers hold degrees from a Spanish university, have training in Spanish law, and be fluent in Spanish. As of September 2005, seventeen teachers were providing Islamic instruction in schools in Andalucia (thirteen), Aragon (three) and the Basque Country (one). In addition, twenty teachers already provide Islamic instruction in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

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 described above. Members of all religious groups serve as members of a government Committee of Advisors on Religious Freedom. It also sponsors university courses and seminars with representatives of different religious confessions. In 2005, the Government held interreligious roundtables at the University Menendez Pelayo of Santander and the University of Madrid. In 2005, the Government hosted a conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance in Cordoba under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The conference included representatives of all religious groups as well as international experts on the subject of religious freedom. Government officials placed great emphasis specifically on the issue of anti-Semitism in the country and expressed interest in maintaining a regular dialogue with the U.S. Government on anti-Semitic activity in the country. The Government also appointed a special envoy within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to serve as a liaison between the Jewish community and international organizations dedicated to combating anti-Semitism in Europe, such as the Forum for International Cooperation on Holocaust, Education, Remembrance, and Research in Warsaw.

Restrictions on Freedom of Religion

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

The Islamic and Protestant federations continued to report that the building permit process for new mosque and church construction could be difficult and lengthy, especially for building sites in central urban locations. According to FEERI, new mosque construction sometimes was forced into less-visible suburban areas, primarily because of resistance from neighborhood groups. FEERI 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.

The Government funds Catholic chaplains for the military, prisons, and hospitals. The 1992 bilateral agreements recognize the right of Protestant and Muslim members of the armed forces to have access to religious services, subject to the needs of the service and authorization by their superiors. According to the agreements,

such services are to be provided by ministers and imams approved by the religious federations and authorized by the military command. However, Protestant and Muslim leaders continued to report that there are no military regulations to implement the 1992 agreements. FERDE reported that evangelical military service personnel must leave their barracks to meet chaplains and participate in evangelical religious services. Muslim leaders reported that prison officials generally provide access for imams 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 scheduled to appoint worship ministers who would then be authorized by the Penitentiary Administration to conduct religious services in the jails.

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 violent anti-Semitic acts against individual members of the community were rare, they were concerned about anti-Semitism expressed as vandalism against Jewish institutions. Two synagogues in Barcelona belonging to the Jewish community of Barcelona and the Jewish Community Atid of Catalunya were vandalized repeatedly in recent years and again in 2005. The vandalism included anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of the synagogue. The groups also reported their belief that local extremist groups monitored them. The regional government responded by increasing security at the center.

Jewish community leaders also cited some incidents of anti-Semitic propaganda in the media and in local government institutions. In May 2006, the president of the Federation of Jewish Communities stated that "a new political anti-Semitism," which manifests itself in bias towards the Palestinians, is growing in the Spanish press. In 2004, a Star of David, placed side-by-side with a swastika, appeared on a City Hall webpage in Barcelona. City officials removed the symbols without explaining why they were placed there. In the same year, in the region of Galicia in the northern part of the country, the mayor of the town of Oleiros approved public signs that described the Israeli prime minister as an "animal" and labeled member of his government "neo-Nazis." The Government responded by issuing a strong statement condemning the incident. The mayor later agreed to remove the signs.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The growth of the country's immigrant population at times led to social friction, which in isolated instances had a religious component. Many citizens blamed recent Moroccan immigrants for increased crime rates in the country. These beliefs sometimes resulted in anti-Muslim sentiment, which in some cases led to attacks and vandalism. The attackers were reported to be skinheads who wanted to link Muslims to radical Islamist terrorism, according to police and Muslim leaders. Muslim leaders stated that Islamic communities continued to suffer from discrimination, particularly in obtaining employment and rental housing. They were concerned that media reports appeared to link Islam to the terrorist attacks. In February 2005, Sigma Dos, a private polling agency, conducted a national survey of 1,000 individuals on attitudes on the Muslim population in the country. The poll revealed that 70 percent of those who responded had had no contact with Muslims, and 48 percent stated they knew almost nothing about Islam or Muslims. Nevertheless, approximately 43 percent of respondents said the greatest threat of the presence of Muslims in the country was the possibility that fundamentalists would carry out a terrorist attack.

In 2005, the Government began to observe January 27 as Holocaust Remembrance Day. Regional governments, including those in both Madrid and Catalonia, initiated similar commemoration.

On January 28, 2006, attackers burned the Qur'an and threw religious books into a trash can in a mosque in Soria. Several months earlier, the mosque had been spray-painted with graffiti. Girona, Salt, Palafrugell, and San Vicente de Castellet, four towns in Catalonia, also reported recent attacks on mosques and Islamic butcher shops. On October 23, 2005, in the eastern town of Reus, police detained two carloads of skinheads armed with Molotov cocktails, spray paint, weapons, and Nazi propaganda as they headed towards the local mosque.

In April 2006, an arson attack on a mosque in the enclave city of Ceuta, where one-third of the population was Muslim, raised fears of growing intolerance towards Muslims. The burning of the Sidi Bel Abbas sanctuary came just three months after arsonists attacked another sanctuary in the enclave.

SECTION IV. U.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 outreach group to coordinate and promote increased contact with the Islamic community. During the period covered by this report, the mission dramatically increased its contacts in this community by reaching out to leadership of the Islamic Commission of Spain and keeping in close contact with Spain's largest mosque. Embassy officers established new relationships with numerous immigrant and religious groups, and nominated a record number of international visitors of Muslim faith. The embassy utilized the Bureau of International Information Programs' speaker program to bring Muslim-Americans to the country to speak on matters of religious tolerance. The ambassador established close links with his counterparts from the Muslim world, and met repeatedly with leaders of the Muslim and Jewish communities in the country. The embassy also discussed with government officials the attempts by the Church of Scientology to register.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 173,732 square miles and a population of 9.1 million. Approximately 77 percent of the population belonged to the Church of Sweden. Increasing numbers of persons have left the Church of Sweden each year since it separated from the state in 2000. Between November 2, 2004, and November 1, 2005, 68,040 persons left the Church. Church of Sweden studies found that individuals left primarily for economic reasons; membership carries a tax of 1.19 percent of members' incomes. In 2004, the Church of Sweden baptized 68.5 percent of children, a figure that has steadily declined over the past two decades. Confirmations declined more sharply; according to the latest available figures, less than 40 percent of Swedish fifteen-year-olds were confirmed in 2004, as opposed to 80 percent in 1970.

There was an estimated 145,000 Roman Catholics, of whom 82,000 were registered with the Roman Catholic Church. Approximately 85 percent of Catholics were 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 celebrated Mass in their respective languages, as did the Polish, Croatian, Spanish, Italian, Eritrean, Vietnamese, Korean, and Ukrainian communities.

The Orthodox Church had approximately 100,000 practicing members. The main national Orthodox churches were Syrian, Serbian, Greek, Romanian, and Macedonian.

There was a large Finnish-speaking Lutheran denomination.

While weekly services in Christian houses of worship generally were poorly attended, a large number of persons observed major festivals of the ecclesiastical year and preferred religious ceremonies to mark turning points in life such as weddings and funerals.

Those who attended Protestant churches, other than the Church of Sweden, totaled more than 400,000. The Pentecostal movement and the Missionary (or Missions) Church were the largest Protestant groups outside of the Church of Sweden. In 2005, the Pentecostal movement had 86,669 registered members, a figure reflecting a steady decline from a peak of more than 100,000 in 1985. The Missionary Church had 64,251 registered members in 2002, the latest year for which statistics were available.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) had approximately 9,000 members. Jehovah's Witnesses counted approximately 23,000 members.

The total number of Jews living in the country is estimated to be 18,500–20,000; however, the Jewish community estimates 10,000 active, or practicing, members. There are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewish synagogues, found mostly in the cities. Large numbers of Jews attend High Holy Day services, but attendance at weekly services is low.

The major religious communities and the Church of Sweden were spread across the country. Large numbers of immigrants in recent decades have introduced various religions to the country, such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and a number of Christian denominations in those communities populated by immigrants. These communities tended to be concentrated in the larger cities.

Buddhists numbered approximately 15,000; Hindus numbered between 7,000 and 10,000. There were estimated to be just over 1,000 Sikhs and approximately 500 Zoroastrians. Reliable statistics on the number of atheists were not available; however, past estimates placed the figure at 15 to 20 percent of the adult population.

The exact number of Muslims was difficult to estimate. However, it has increased rapidly through immigration in the past several years. The number provided by the Muslim community was approximately 350,000, of whom an estimated 100,000 were reportedly active. Muslim affiliations among immigrant groups were predominantly with the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam. There were mosques in many parts of the country.

A significant number of smaller, internationally active religious groups have also been established in the country. Such groups included 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 rights to practice one's religion and protection of religious freedom. The laws concerning religious freedoms are generally observed and enforced at all government levels and by the courts in a non-discriminatory fashion. Legal protections cover discrimination or persecution by private actors.

Since the separation of church and state in 2000, eight recognized religious denominations, in addition to the Church of Sweden, raise revenues through member-contributions made through the national tax system. All recognized denominations are entitled to direct government financial support, contributions made through the national tax system, or a mix of both. The state does not favor the Church of Sweden at the expense of other religious groups in any noticeable way. Since the population is predominantly Christian, certain Christian religious holy days are national holidays, but this does not appear to affect other religious groups negatively. School students from minority religious backgrounds are entitled to take relevant religious holidays.

No recognition or registration is required to carry out religious activity. Religious groups that want to receive government aid may apply for it. The Government considers the number of members in the group and its length of establishment, but applies no specific criteria.

Religious education covering all major world religions is compulsory in public schools. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools, all of which receive government subsidies, provided they adhere to government guidelines on core academic curriculum.

The Office of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination investigates claims of discrimination "due to race, skin color, national or ethnic origin, or religion." Discrimination on religious grounds is illegal, including discrimination in the work place and in the provision of public and private services.

In May 2006, the National School Authority ruled that a public school in the city of Umea had acted improperly for expelling a Muslim student for wearing a head scarf. The ruling enables Muslim students to wear head scarves in school.

Following a 1998 public opinion poll that showed a low percentage of Swedish schoolchildren had even basic knowledge of the Holocaust, the Government launched nationwide Holocaust education projects. Approximately one million copies of the projects' core textbook are in circulation and available in many languages, at no cost, to every household with children.

The Living History Forum—a government organization established in 2003 to promote tolerance, democracy and human rights using the Holocaust as a starting point—and the Swedish Committee against anti-Semitism initiated an ongoing educational program on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and racism. Designed for teachers and others working in education, the program aims to establish a network of well-educated and engaged individuals who can spread knowledge of the Holocaust.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding and meets annually with representatives from various religious groups. The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities is a government body consisting of twenty-two registered religious groups (thirty-seven including sub-groups) entitled to government aid.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The law requires animal slaughter to be preceded by the administration of anesthetics to minimize undue suffering by the animal. The Jewish community has protested that this prevents the practice of kosher slaughter in the country, requiring kosher meat to be imported. The Muslim community appeared to be split between those who believed certain anesthetic methods do not conflict with halal requirements, and those who believed that they do. A government investigation of the law was scheduled to present its results by April 30, 2007.

The law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, in the case of boys under the age of two months, in the presence of a person certified by the National Board of Health. Approximately 3,000 Muslim boys and forty to fifty Jewish boys are circumcised each year. The National Board of Health has certified Jewish mohels (persons ordained to carry out circumcision according to the Jewish faith) to carry out the operations, but a medical doctor or an anesthesia nurse must accompany them. Some members of the Jewish and Muslim communities have protested against the law on the grounds that it interferes with their religious traditions. The National Board of Health and Welfare Authority reviewed the law and recommended its continued usage.

Individuals serving in the military are given the time and opportunity to fulfill religious requirements. The military makes available food options fulfilling religious dietary requirements and allows time for appropriate mourning periods. Some regiments have an imam attached to them to facilitate religious observance by Muslim soldiers. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from national military service.

Armed forces guidelines allow the wearing of religious headwear. In 2005, a Sikh finished his military service, throughout which he wore a turban. 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 country's newspaper Svenska Dagbladet reported that the ombudsman against ethnic discrimination was suing Gothenburg city 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; a court hearing had not taken place by the end of the period covered by this report.

In July 2004, Pentecostal Pastor Ake Green was convicted and sentenced to one month's imprisonment under a hate-speech law that criminalizes agitation against ethnic groups. Green's conviction resulted from a sermon in which he condemned homosexuality, in part on the basis of biblical teachings. Green challenged the verdict on the basis of freedom of speech and, in February 2005, an appeals court ruled in Green's favor and overturned the conviction. The Government then appealed the February decision to the Supreme Court, which in November acquitted Green on the basis of Articles 9 (freedom of religion) and 10 (freedom of expression) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In April 2005, a district court in Stenungsund sentenced Leif Liljestrom to two months' imprisonment for violation of the hate-speech law and for violation of a website content law. The individual had posted on a Christian website material

judged to be offensive toward homosexuals. Liljestrom appealed the conviction, arguing that the online content reflected his Christian convictions. In April 2006, an appeals court in Gothenburg acquitted Liljestrom of the hate-speech and website content charges, but found him guilty of being an accomplice to hate-speech for allowing third parties to post offensive material on his website. The appeals court sentenced Liljestrom to one month's imprisonment. Liljestrom filed an appeal to the Gothenburg court decision; the Supreme Court had not yet decided on whether to accept the case by the end of the reporting period.

Three trade unions and the Employers' Association agreed in April 2005 on compensatory holiday leave hours that will allow non-Christians to substitute their religious holy days for Christian holy days that are also national holidays.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitism

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 Swedish 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 two years or, if the crime is petty, to a fine." The chancellor of justice opined 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 ten gravestones in the Jewish Cemetery in Stockholm in August 2005. The Congregation also reported that approximately fifty Jews and individuals with Jewish-sounding last names received letters with anti-Semitic content during the September–October period.

In June 2006, a court convicted three high school students for violation of the country's hate-speech law for making Nazi salutes in front of teachers and fellow students. The court sentenced two of those convicted to fines and the third to social counseling.

The number of reported anti-Semitic crimes has increased since the end of the 1990s, and averaged approximately 130 annually during the period 2000–2003, with 128 crimes reported in 2003. In 2004, the number of anti-Semitic crimes rose by 44 percent, an increase in police attribute largely to a change in statistical methodology. The largest single category of anti-Semitic crime in 2004 was agitation against an ethnic group, with sixty-six reported incidents, and unlawful threat/molestation second, with forty-two reported incidents. There were seven reported cases of assault during the same period. This means that the number of assaults more than doubled compared to 2003, when three assaults were reported. Nazi symbolism, such as Hitler salutes and the use of swastikas, was associated with 27 percent of reported anti-Semitic crimes. Some Jews believed that increases in attacks were directly linked to increased tensions in the Middle East. Since the beginning of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000, some in the Jewish community saw its primary threats as coming from Islamists and leftist extremists, as opposed to the traditional neo-Nazi threat. Representatives of the Jewish community organizations in the country believed that it was unfair that they were obliged to bear costs for security measures, as they believed that the state should guarantee the security of its citizens.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Citizens were generally tolerant of diverse religious practitioners. 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 categories relating to the targeting of specific religious groups, with the exception of anti-Semitic attacks. There were inadequate figures on incidents or crimes motivated by religious prejudice or intolerance toward members of the Muslim community. The Office of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination received reports of discrimination on religious grounds, including religious affiliation, during the period covered by this report. Exact statistics were not available.

In October 2004, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention and the Living History Forum together presented a report on intolerance towards Muslims and Jews among high school students. In March 2006, both organizations released their follow-up report on anti-Semitism among the population as a whole. Five percent of individuals questioned for the report, and 39 percent of those questioned who identified themselves as Muslims, indicated strong anti-Semitic views; 36 percent of all respondents indicated an ambivalent view towards Jewish people.

In November 2005, Swedish Radio (SR) reported that four of ten Islamic organizations in the country believe they had been threatened, according to an investigation by an SR news program which interviewed 100 organizations that together represented 80 thousand Muslims. The report stated that three of ten organizations had been attacked, vandalized, and damaged. Abuses ranged from graffiti to attacks with fire bombs.

The Jehovah's Witnesses and members of various smaller Christian churches reported incidents of discrimination during the past few years.

In September and October 2005, unidentified individuals carried out arson attacks at the Islamic Center in Malmo. The attacks did not result in extensive damage, unlike the serious arson attack against the center that occurred in 2003.

In May 2006, two masked individuals stabbed a Sunni Muslim imam in the city of Gavle. The imam sustained a chest wound. Authorities were investigating the case but had made no arrests by the end of the period covered by this report.

Many religious communities are involved in interfaith dialogue. However, in May 2004, the Jewish central council decided that the Jewish community should withdraw from official cooperation with the Church of Sweden after the launch of the Church's HOPP (HOPE) campaign for a just peace in the Middle East. Archbishop KG Hammar endorsed the campaign, which included a recommendation to boycott Israeli goods originating from occupied territory. Cooperation was likely to resume following the June 2006 appointment of a new archbishop, who signaled his intent for the Church to play a less political role.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The embassy maintained regular contacts with local religious leaders, and embassy officials have participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance. The embassy also nominated individuals to participate in International Visitor programs on religious diversity.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. However, negative reaction to immigration, the conflict in the Middle East, and terrorist acts by Muslim extremists in foreign countries, have increased intolerance towards religious minorities. The growing Muslim population, a number of reports of Muslim clerics preaching extremist views, and the international controversy over the Danish newspaper cartoons of Muhammad have spurred the public debate on the role of Muslim believers 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 approximately 7.29 million. Three-quarters of the population nominally adhered to either the Roman Catholic or Protestant churches, but actual church attendance rates were much lower. The Muslim population was the largest religious minority, making up approximately 4 percent of the resident population. More than 11 percent of citizens claimed no formal allegiance to any church or religious community.

Over the past several years, noticeable membership shifts occurred within the various religious denominations. Historically, more than 95 percent of the population was evenly split between the Swiss Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic Church; however, since the 1970s, there has been a steady increase of persons formally renouncing their church membership. In the Roman Catholic Church, immigration from southern Europe has countered this trend. The arrival of immigrants from other areas has contributed to the noticeable growth of religious communities that had little presence in the country in the past. According to the Government's Statistics Office, membership in religious denominations was as follows: 41.8 percent Roman Catholic; 33.0 percent Protestant; 1.8 percent Orthodox; 0.2 percent Old Catholic; 0.2 percent other Christian groups; 4.3 percent Muslim; 0.2 percent Jewish; 0.8 percent other religions (Buddhist, Hindu, and other); and 11.1 percent professed no formal creed.

According to official census statistics, the Muslim population increased significantly from 57,000 in 1980, to 152,000 in 1990, and to 311,000 in 2000. Muslim immigrants from North African countries typically settled in the French-speaking western part of the country, whereas those arriving from Turkey, Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia commonly relocated in the German-speaking eastern and central parts. There were two major mosques, one in Zurich (built in 1963 and belonging to the Ahmadiyya movement) and one in Geneva (built in 1978 and financed by Saudi Arabia). There were approximately 120 Muslim centers located throughout the country in private homes or office complexes.

Approximately 75 percent of Jewish households were located in the urban areas of four major cities: Zurich, Geneva, Basel, and Bern. There were four distinguishable Jewish subgroups: orthodox, conservative, liberal, and reform. An estimated 15 percent of Jews belonged to the orthodox branch.

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 twenty-six cantons (with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel, where church and state are separated) 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 church tax may have to leave the church formally. In some cantons, private companies are unable to avoid payment of the church tax. Some cantons grant "church taxation" status, which the traditional three Christian communities enjoy, to the Jewish community. Islamic and other nonofficial religious groups are excluded from these benefits.

In February 2005, voters in Zurich canton comfortably adopted a new Cantonal Constitution that grants the three traditional Christian communities greater autonomy in regulating their internal affairs. The new constitution also grants official recognition to two local Jewish communities but does not provide for the raising of funds through taxation as with the three Christian communities. Neither does the new constitution provide for the official recognition of Islam or other religious communities. On October 30, 2005, voters in Basel adopted a new cantonal constitution that paves the way for granting non-traditional religious communities, including Islam, recognition as official religions under cantonal law. The Basel cantonal constitution was awaiting approval by the Federal Parliament when the period covered by this report ended.

A religious organization must register with the Government in order to receive tax-exempt status.

In 2004, the Federal Council (cabinet) decided to appoint an ambassador to the Vatican in order to establish full diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

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. During 2004 and 2005, a total of 60 ordained clergymen and 120 non-ordained religious employees were working on short-term permits in the country.

Religious education is taught in most public cantonal schools, with the exception of Geneva and Neuchatel. Classes in Roman Catholic and Protestant 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 Muslim doctrine since 2002. In some cantons, religious classes are entirely voluntary, while in others they form part of the curriculum; waivers, however, are routinely granted for children whose parents request them. Those of different faiths are free to attend classes for their own creeds during the class period. Parents may also send their children to private religious schools and to classes offered by their church, or they may teach their children at home.

A number of cantons reformed religious education in public schools during the reporting period to either complement or entirely supplant traditional classes in Christian doctrine with non-confessional teachings about religion and culture. French-speaking primary schools in Fribourg, Vaud, Wallis, Jura, and Bern adopted a new religious tutorial that gives prominent coverage to non-Christian denominations as well. In the central part of the country, authorities in a number of cantons decided to complement religious classes being offered by the individual religious communities with secular teachings about ethics and religion. The first of these cantons, Obwalden, introduced its religion and ethics program in 2005. In Zurich, the government's board of public education decided to introduce a new subject, Religion and Culture, to secondary schools, which would expose pupils to all major religious traditions, with no precedence given to any one of them, in an effort to foster interconfessional understanding and tolerance in a multi-cultural society. Textbooks and the curriculum were being drafted and the training of lay teachers was being prepared. Classes were scheduled to begin in school year 2007–2008. At the primary school level, authorities announced plans also to introduce secularized religious instruction in a move to counter a citizens' ballot initiative against a 2004 government decision to cut funding for traditional classes in biblical history. The Canton of Basel was contemplating similar steps but had not made any firm decisions by the end of the period covered by this report. In virtually all cantons contemplating or implementing reform, authorities planed to make the non-confessional teachings about religion and culture a non-elective part of the curriculum for all pupils.

The question of waivers other than from religious classes gave rise to some controversy at the end of 2005 after the county of Stettlen in the Canton of Bern excused a nine-year-old girl from a Muslim family from swimming and from some physical education classes. In spring 2006, however, the Libyan refugee family withdrew the demand for special treatment of their daughter. There are no national guidelines regarding exemptions on religious grounds, 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 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.

The debate over the country's World War II record contributed to the problem of anti-Semitism. To counter anti-Semitism and racism, in 2001, the Federal Department of the Interior created the Federal Service for the Combating of Racism to coordinate antiracism activities of the Federal Administration with cantonal and communal authorities. Between 2001 and 2005, this service managed a project fund of $11.1 million (15 million Swiss francs), which supported more than 500 projects to combat racism, including some projects specifically addressing the problem of anti-Semitism. After the completion of the one-time project fund, the Federal Service for the Combating of Racism continued to support anti-racism activities with money from the regular federal budget. For the year 2006, Parliament earmarked $640 thousand (800 thousand Swiss francs) to fund projects.

Of the fourteen political parties represented in the Federal Parliament, four (the Christian Democratic Party, the Evangelical People's Party, the Federal Democratic

Union, and the Christian Social Party) subscribe to a religious philosophy. There were no reports of individuals being excluded from a political party because of their religious beliefs.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were several reports of authorities taking measures to prevent or stop Muslim clerics from spreading religious ideas that clash with basic precepts of the country's legal order.

In 2004, the Federal Office of Migration (FOM) rejected the 2003 work permit applications of two Muslim clerics that the Islamic Center in Geneva had filed with local authorities because of the extremist views of the Islamic Center's leader, Hani Ramadan. On October 5, 2005, the Justice Ministry's appeals body upheld the FOM decision, thus setting a precedent of rejecting work permit applications for Muslim imams on ideological grounds.

In 2004, Basel authorities asked a Muslim imam to depart the country after learning that the imam, a Saudi national working as a lay teacher in a local Muslim school, had justified some form of domestic violence based on teachings of the Qur'an. Basel follows a zero-tolerance policy regarding the interpretation in public of religious texts that violate the constitution or federal or cantonal law.

In May 2005, a Geneva administrative court ordered the cantonal government to recognize Hani Ramadan's status as public servant and resume paying his salary. Ramadan was suspended from his duties as public school teacher in the fall of 2002, following the publication of an article in the French newspaper Le Monde in which he favored the stoning of adulterers as set out in Islamic law (Shari'a). Ramadan, who heads the Islamic Center in Geneva, was dismissed in 2003 following an administrative investigation, but he successfully appealed the decision. Following a second investigation, however, the Geneva cantonal government confirmed Ramadan's dismissal and removed him from the cantonal payroll in December 2004. The cantonal government stated its intention to honor the administrative court ruling but not to re-instate Ramadan in his former teaching duties.

In September 2005, the city of Fribourg dismissed two school employees for refusing to remove their Islamic headscarves during working hours. The two young women were employed to tend to children after school hours. Fribourg had previously banned the wearing of religious apparel in schools. The Canton of Geneva has a similar provision which has been upheld by the Federal Tribunal (Supreme Court) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR found that the Canton of Geneva's legal provisions did not discriminate against religious convictions, but were meant to protect the rights of other subjects as well as the public order.

Resident Muslim organizations complained that it was nearly impossible to acquire zoning approval to build mosques or Muslim cemeteries, since this authority rested with individual counties and municipalities. The building commission of the northwestern village of Wangen in the Canton of Solothurn blocked the plans of a local Turkish cultural association to add a minaret to its house of worship. Officially, the planned eighteen-foot (six-meter) high minaret was blocked because of violations of zoning restrictions, but the association reportedly believed the decision to be political. When the association filed the building permit application in September 2005, local political opposition quickly formed, and community leaders took a public stance against the project. The association stated its intention to appeal the decision to the cantonal justice department.

Reports from the Cantons of Aargau and Bern stated that Muslim communities there faced similar opposition to community building projects. There were two minarets in the country, at the Geneva and Zurich mosques.

Ritual slaughter (the bleeding to death of animals that have not first been stunned) was made illegal in the country in 1893; however, a 1978 Law on the Protection of Animals explicitly allows for the importation of kosher and halal meat. Imported from France and Germany, this meat is available in the country at comparable prices. In 2003, a popular initiative to protect animal rights and prohibit the import of meat from animals bled without stunning was filed; in December 2005, however, the sponsors withdrew their initiative before it had been submitted to a national vote after Parliament adopted a revision of the Law on the Protection of Animals.

On May 10, 2006, the Federal Tribunal (Supreme Court) upheld the decision of authorities in the Canton of Basel to reject the citizenship application of a Turkish national woman on the grounds that she lacked a desire to integrate into society. The woman, who worked as a voluntary religious teacher, had appealed the rejec-

tion, claiming that it was due to her profession of Islam and her corresponding living habits. The Federal Tribunal opined that the negative decision of the Basel authorities was neither discriminatory nor a violation of religious freedom rights, but rather a manifestation of the legal precept that individuals who voluntarily seclude themselves from the population should be denied citizenship. At the same time, it held that the appeal raised delicate questions and therefore decided to cover the legal costs of the indigent woman in spite of the negative ruling.

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 June 29, 2006, the Geneva-based Intercommunity Center for Coordination against anti-Semitism and Defamation (CICAD) hosted a conference in Geneva to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Roman Catholic Church's declaration Nostra Aetate and to discuss interreligious dialogue between Jews and Catholics. Participants included senior representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish community, as well as Federal Councilor Pascal Couchepin.

On May 8, 2006, the Zurich cantonal parliament held the opening ceremony of its annual session in a local synagogue instead of the typical setting of a Christian church. The ceremony was meant to honor the official recognition of two Jewish communities under the new cantonal constitution that entered into force at the beginning of 2006.

In December 2005, the Federal Council (cabinet) allocated $8 million (10 million Swiss francs) to the Swiss National Science Foundation for a new research program to study the transformation of individual forms of belief and the changing role of religious communities in society in recent years. The objective of the research program was to delineate areas of conflict between adherents of different creeds, as well as between believers and nonbelievers, and to develop ways to ease religious tensions. The program was also expected to pave the way for debate on an eventual article on religion in the constitution.

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 was scheduled to run from June 2006 to September 2007, aimed to involve as many youths as possible in local and regional projects.

The country participated in the April 2004 conference sponsored by the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on anti-Semitism, in Berlin. State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Franz von Daniken highlighted the various ways through which the country was confronting anti-Semitism. He condemned all forms of racism and anti-Semitism and fully endorsed the OSCE measures to promote tolerance and nondiscrimination.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

Senior leaders of the country's Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities met in Bern on May 15, 2006, to formally establish a Swiss Council of Religions to promote interreligious dialogue and to serve as a consultation partner for the federal Government. The Council was meant to foster religious peace; to build confidence between different faiths; to find common positions on issues of mutual interest; and to engage in political dialogue on faith-related and social issues. Inspiration for this Council sprang from an interreligious ceremony held in Bern cathedral in March 2003, on the eve of the Iraq war. Implementation began following a July 2004 meeting of high-level representatives belonging to the three religious communities in Bern. The Swiss Council of Religions included senior representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, Old Catholics, the Swiss Protestant Church, and the Muslim and Jewish communities. Evangelical churches, the Christian Orthodox Church, and other religions were not represented but could join the Council at a later stage.

On January 23, 2005, representatives of ten Christian denominations in the country signed the Charta Oecumenica, an ecumenical charter concerning closer cooperation in Europe, after a televised inter-confessional service in the Church of St. Ursanne in northwestern Switzerland. The text of the charter, written in 2001 by representatives of the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions, mentioned the need for Christian unity in Europe and a common approach to spreading

the Christian faith. However, in November 2004, the Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches had instructed its ministers not to administer Holy Communion jointly with Roman Catholic clergy. The 2004 recommendation came only months after the Vatican's instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum, which reaffirmed the exclusion of non-Catholics from the celebration of Holy Communion.

The Swiss Observatory of Religions based in Lausanne noted an increase in anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic feelings over the last decade. In a statement following the March 2005 arson attack on the Lugano synagogue, the Federal Commission Against Racism observed that the climate against members of religious minorities and their institutions had deteriorated in general. Although physical violence was rare, most anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim remarks have largely been fueled by extensive media reports over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Holocaust Assets issue, and terrorist acts by Muslim extremists in foreign countries.

In March 2005, two arson attacks were launched in the city of Lugano, in the southern canton of Ticino, one against a clothing store owned by a Jewish family and another against the synagogue. The attacks completely destroyed the clothing store and severely damaged the ground floor beneath the main sanctuary of the synagogue. No one was hurt in either incident. Shortly after the incidents, police arrested a 58-year-old resident Italian national with a mental condition, who confessed to the arson attacks. The Ticino cantonal prosecutor later publicly stated that the perpetrator had acted alone without any apparent connection to other individuals and ruled out overtly anti-Semitic motives for the two arson attacks, a claim the psychiatric evaluation later corroborated. In November 2005, a Ticino court sentenced the Italian national to two years in prison; the sentence was suspended for psychiatric treatment. Though more recent attacks on synagogues had been restricted to vandalism and anti-Semitic graffiti, the arson attack in Lugano was the first instance in living memory of the burning of a house of worship within the country. President Samuel Schmid immediately condemned the arson attacks and pledged government support in fighting anti-Semitism. Three days after the attacks, over 1,000 people, including representatives of all major religious communities, gathered in Lugano to express their support for the Jewish community.

During the night of March 31, 2006, unidentified vandals smashed several windows of the synagogue in Lausanne. The local Jewish community filed a report with the police. CICAD denounced the attack and expressed concern over the series of anti-Semitic incidents occurring in the French part of the country. In April 2005, vandals spray-painted anti-Semitic graffiti on the walls of, and on a Holocaust memorial just outside of, the Grand Synagogue in Geneva. In May 2005, unidentified vandals desecrated a dozen tombs of the Jewish cemetery of Vevey-Montreux. No suspects were arrested.

In 2005, CICAD recorded seventy-five 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. In 2004, the year recordings began, CICAD noted thirty-four incidents. The former president of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities cautioned that the CICAD statistics did not represent a wider national trend.

According to data gathered by the Federal Commission against Racism, between 1995 and 2002 there were 212 prosecutions for violations of the anti-racism clause, leading to 110 indictments that resulted in 89 convictions. Most prominent among the identified victims were Jews, followed by foreigners of different ethnic origin and dark-skinned people. More than 70 percent of the racist acts were verbal or written slurs, or the distribution of racist material; only 3 percent were physical assaults.

In his radio and television address commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe, President Schmid stated that it was in the best interest of all to resolutely oppose all totalitarian and extremist endeavors, as well as all forms of racism and anti-Semitism.

In July 2005, the Zurich cantonal prosecutor closed the investigation of a political advertisement for violation of the anti-racism law; no charges were made. During the national referendum campaign to ease restrictions on granting citizenship to second- and third-generation immigrants, opponents ran a controversial advertisement suggesting that the Muslim population would double every decade and would become the majority population within the country by 2040. The Zurich cantonal prosecutor concluded that the advertisement created a climate of fear but did not incite discrimination or denigrate members of the Muslim community. The electorate rejected the constitutional amendments on easing citizenship restrictions in a national ballot vote in September 2004.

Prompted by the international controversy over the (re-)publication of Muhammad cartoons in a Danish newspaper, three of the four major political parties communicated their positions regarding the relationship between the state and the Muslim

community. In April 2006, the center-left Christian Democratic Party (CVP) published a twenty-page white paper on the role of Muslim believers in society. The paper stressed the primacy of the standing legal order, emphasizing the equality of the sexes and the ban on forced marriage and domestic violence. For the CVP, freedom of religion implied the right of Muslim women to choose whether or not to wear religious headscarves, as well as the right of anyone over the age of sixteen to adhere or not adhere to any religion. The CVP advocated banning fundamentalist imams from entering the country while establishing a faculty for Muslim theology at a Swiss university. The conservative Free Democratic Party (FDP) published a resolution maintaining that liberalism and democracy could be reconciled with the Islamic faith. The FDP advocated equal assessment of church towers and minarets by the same building codes and zoning restrictions. In March 2006, the right-populist Swiss People's Party (SVP) published a white paper on migration policy. The SVP paper stressed that the country's legal and customary norms applied to all and criticized government policy as too accommodating to minority requests. According to the SVP, foreigners increasingly abused the country's liberal order to engage in political agitation that undermined neutrality and exploited religious freedom by requesting special treatment, such as waivers for Muslim girls from swimming lessons in public schools.

In the Federal Parliament, the SVP, nominally the strongest faction, tabled two motions in December 2004 and February 2005, respectively, to abolish the Federal Commission against Racism and to erase the anti-racism clause from the Federal Penal Code, which criminalizes racist or anti-Semitic action or expression, whether in public speech or in printed material. Both motions have yet to be debated in Parliament.

According to statistics gathered by the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism, a local organization combating intolerance and xenophobia, the total number of reported incidents against foreigners or minorities was 103 in 2005, which was somewhat decreased from 108 incidents in 2004. These figures included instances of verbal and written attacks, which were much more frequent than physical assaults.

A 2004 study by the Zurich University found no evidence of anti-Semitism in the country's German language media, but noted that newspapers and electronic media often resorted to questionable stereotypes. The study also said that Muslims were more likely to be portrayed as aggressors or as opposed to democracy.

In April 2004, the Zurich lawyer and honorary chairman of the Jewish religious community, Sigi Feigel, sued the political party Europa Partei Schweiz, claiming that it sponsored newspaper advertisements comparing Israel to Nazi Germany. The party, which is not represented in Parliament, ran advertisements in the daily Tages-Anzeiger the day after the killing of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi, calling on the Government to cut off diplomatic relations and end military cooperation with Israel. The advertisements referred to "Israel, nation of the Jews" and stated, "with the exception of the gas chambers, all the Nazi instruments are being used against (Israel's) resident population." In March 2006, a Zurich cantonal prosecutor, in agreement with the claimant parties, closed the case without bringing charges.

In May 2005, the Zurich cantonal appeals court acquitted the Jewish author of an anti-Islamist pamphlet from the charge of violating the anti-racism law on the grounds that in a political context even exaggerated criticism must be tolerated as long as it is not overtly racist.

On January 27, 2006, following the precedent of previous years, schools across the country held a day of remembrance for victims of the Holocaust. Education authorities said the aim was to remember the Holocaust and other forms of genocide committed in the past century and raise awareness of inhumane ideologies.

In October 2004, a forty-five-year-old African national entered the Islamic Center in Lausanne during Friday prayers and attacked the imam with a knife, seriously injuring him and a nearby worshiper in the stomach. The assailant had the knife taped to his hand and, in the ensuing scuffle, injured another six persons, including himself, before he could be controlled by bystanders and apprehended by the police. According to police, the assailant had escaped from a hospital where he was undergoing psychiatric evaluations. Vaud judicial authorities opened an investigation that remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

There were several reports of resident members of the Muslim community expressing concern about or alerting authorities to foreign imams giving radical speeches in mosques or local prayer rooms. In November 2004, a Muslim imam was asked to depart from Basel Canton for justifying some forms of domestic violence; he was also denounced by members of the local Muslim community. The former imam of the Islamic Center in Zurich, Youssef Ibram, stated that the storm of indignation following a November 2004 interview with a Swiss-French magazine, in

which he refused to take an unequivocal stance against the stoning of adulterers, damaged his relations with the leadership of the community and left him no choice but to resign from his position. In April 2004, Swiss Muslims in Geneva complained that foreign imams invited to the Grand Mosque of Geneva for a prayer were giving radical speeches, sometimes filled with invectives against the Jewish population and western countries.

In June 2005, the local Association of Muslim Organizations in Zurich made public a charter adopted in March committing its fifteen member societies to uphold the established legal order and democracy. The charter calls for the peaceful coexistence of and dialogue between different cultures and religions, rejects violence, and demands respect for human rights and equality. The charter calls for the integration of members of the Muslim communities with society and active engagement for the common good.

Efforts to set up a training program in the country for Muslim clerics and religious teachers were advanced in Basel, where cantonal authorities and the local university initiated the establishment of a chair for Muslim history and theology. In 2004, the university held exploratory talks with the Vienna-based Academy for Islamic Religious Education, but private financing for the chair has not yet been assured. Similar efforts to establish a chair for Muslim theology in other locations have failed or stalled, a fact that prompted the newly founded Center on Religion, Science, and Politics of the University of Zurich to launch a study to gauge the political climate regarding the training of Muslim clerics and Islamic religious education in public schools in the country. In November 2004, the Conference of Swiss Bishops and the Swiss Protestant Church Federation both publicly endorsed the idea that imams who lead prayers in Swiss mosques should be trained at Swiss universities; however, the Federal Council (cabinet) cautioned that the training for a specific profession was not a priority at the university level.

The Federal Office of Migration acknowledged that the training of imams posed a problem. Some cantons refused to grant a residency permit to imams considered fundamentalists. Many imams in the country came from Kosovo, Bosnia, the Middle East, and Maghreb countries. They were often either self-taught or trained in Muslim countries, the primary foreign country of training being Saudi Arabia. Officially, the country had two large mosques, in Geneva and Zurich, and approximately 120 prayer rooms. It was believed that another 100 prayer rooms existed, many of them belonging to Albanian, Turkish, or Arab communities. A new Federal Law on Foreigners, which Parliament adopted on December 16, 2005, provides for mandatory training of immigrant clerics in order to facilitate their integration into society. Among other provisions, the training program would ensure that immigrants can speak at least one of the three national languages (French, German, or Italian). The Federal Law on Foreigners was subject to a national referendum vote to be held on September 24, 2006.

While Muslim and Jewish cemeteries existed in the country, two laic cantons (Geneva and Neuchatel) require that all individuals from religious communities be buried in state-owned cemeteries only. Both Jewish and Muslim communities protested that this restriction breaches their freedom of religion and incurs higher costs. Islam prohibits Muslims from being buried in cemeteries belonging to other religions, and Geneva Muslims protested that they were forced to pay expensive repatriation costs to send their deceased by plane to a Muslim country. It was estimated that between 90 and 95 percent of deceased Muslims in Geneva were sent to their countries of origin for burial.

Other religious customs, such as genital mutilation of children, forced marriage, or the unilateral repudiation of marriage by the husband, are illegal. In May 2006, authorities in St. Gallen Canton reportedly deported both the husband and the father of a twenty-one-year-old resident Turkish woman who had been forced into marriage a year earlier in Turkey. The woman had notified police of receiving death threats when she refused to consummate the marriage after her husband had followed her to Switzerland. Both men were banned from reentering the country.

In 2004, Muslim leaders expressed fears of a "witch-hunt" following government revelations that members of half a dozen militant Muslim groups were operating secretly in the country. The Government later confirmed press allegations that these radical Islamic groups included the Tunisian Islamic Front, the Palestinian Hamas, and Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front. The Government stated that it was being more sensitive in the wake of September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, but denied any systematic targeting of the country's Muslims.

There were no reports of difficulties for Muslims buying or renting space for worship, but some Islamic centers continued having difficulties accommodating the growing number of faithful attending Friday prayers. Although occasional complaints arose, such as a Muslim employee not being given time to pray during the

workday, attitudes were generally tolerant toward Muslims. In one poll from November 2004, 76 percent of residents surveyed did not feel threatened by the presence of the 300,000-strong Muslim community living in the country, as opposed to 16 percent who did feel threatened; 61 percent favored a university chair to train Islamic imams in Switzerland; and 53 percent approved of female members of the Muslim community wearing the headscarf to work. In a separate survey of the Muslim community living in the country, 84 percent of the respondents said they felt accepted in the country, with 79 percent declaring that they have never experienced discrimination because of their religion.

However, a sociological study from 2005 found that a significant minority of the resident population holds anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic views. The study, which was part of the Swiss National Science Foundation's research program on right-wing extremism, consisted of a representative sample of more than 3,000 oral interviews probing for extremist beliefs and attitudes towards minorities. According to the study, almost one-quarter of respondents harbored anti-Semitic views or negative stereotypes, a fact that the authors partly explained as a consequence of the controversy over Switzerland's role during World War II. However, the study also established that the majority of anti-Semitic comments made in private occurred in the context of discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Muslim community was seen even more critically: 36 percent of respondents did not believe that Muslims in the country should order their lives in accordance with Islamic customs, and 30 percent of respondents considered it a humiliation for a Muslim woman to wear a headscarf. On the other hand, the study also found that 90 percent of respondents rejected right-wing extremism, and 85 percent approved of the criminal prosecution of racist propaganda.

A government-commissioned survey of thirty Muslim believers found that the resident Islamic community was very diverse. Coming from different countries and cultural backgrounds, religious practices of the mostly immigrant community varied. Most Muslims had no problems practicing their religion, but only a small minority could be considered strict believers, according to the study. Many Muslims praised the country's integration policy, and a majority said they were influenced by Swiss culture. Some complained of discrimination or racism, particularly against women wearing religious headscarves.

The place of the Islamic headscarf in society was an issue of public debate. In October 2004, the country's biggest retailer made headlines when it became public that a request made in August by one of its female employees at a Zurich store to wear her headscarf to work had been put on hold. In November 2004, the retailer granted the request, stating that it would not impose a general ban but decide each case on individual merits. The second biggest retailer, on the other hand, announced that its dress code did not provide for any headgear and that it would henceforth not allow the wearing of the headscarf. In Basel, the candidacy of a young woman in the October 2004 elections to the cantonal parliament who publicly affirmed her intention to continue to wear the headscarf if elected re-kindled the debate over the headscarf in public office. In November 2004, a local conservative party launched a popular initiative to ban all public sector employees or holders of public office from wearing the headscarf on duty. Federal Councilor Moritz Leuenberger publicly opposed an outright ban of the headscarf and warned that such a ban could hamper integration of Muslim women in society.

Many nongovernmental organizations coordinated interfaith events throughout the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with government officials and representatives of the various faiths. Meetings have been held with Swiss Jewish leaders, a senior Muslim professor and community leader, Christian clergy, and human rights officials from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

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

The generally tolerant relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, a sharp debate continued over the country's definition of "secularism," the proper role of religion in society, and the potential influence of the country's small minority of Islamists. 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 dress in government offices, universities, and schools.

According to the general perception, Turkish identity is based on the Turkish language and the Islamic faith. Religious minorities said they were effectively blocked from careers in state institutions. Christians, Baha'is, and some Muslims faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and more radical Islamist elements continued to express anti-Semitic sentiments. Additionally, persons wishing to convert from Islam to another religion sometimes experienced social harassment and violence from relatives and neighbors.

The U.S. Government frequently discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy representatives met frequently with government officials and representatives of religious groups during the reporting year to discuss issues related to religious freedom, including legal reform aimed at lifting restrictions on religious minorities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 301,383 square miles and a population of approximately 69.6 million. According to the Government, approximately 99 percent of the population was Muslim, the majority of which was Sunni. According to the human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Mazlum-Der and representatives of various religious minority communities, the actual percentage of Muslims was slightly lower. The Government officially recognized only three minority religious communities—Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenian Orthodox Christians, and Jews—although other non-Muslim communities existed. 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, there were an estimated fifteen to twenty million Alevis, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shi'a and Sunni Islam and draws on the traditions of other religions found in Anatolia as well. Some Alevis practice rituals that include men and women worshipping together through oratory, poetry, and dance. The Government considered Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; however, some Alevis and radical Sunnis maintained Alevis are not Muslims.

There were several other religious groups, mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities. While exact membership figures were not available, these religious groups included approximately 65,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians; 23,000 Jews; and fewer than 2,500 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 did not extend to the religious leadership organs; for example, the Ecumenical and Armenian Patriarchates continued to seek recognition of their legal status.

There also were 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 estimated there were 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 Muslim 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 constitution establishes the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of belief, freedom of worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas. However, other constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular state restrict these rights. The constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Core institutions of the state, including the presidency, armed forces, judiciary, and state bureaucracy, have played the role of defending traditional Turkish secularism throughout the history of the republic. In some cases, elements of the state have opposed policies of the elected Government on the grounds that they threatened the secular state.

The Government oversees Muslim religious facilities and education through the Diyanet, which is under the authority of the Prime Ministry. The Diyanet 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 the Diyanet 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 some activities of non-Muslim religious groups and their affiliated churches, monasteries, synagogues, and related religious property. There are 161 "minority foundations" recognized by the GDF, including Greek Orthodox foundations with approximately 70 sites, Armenian Orthodox foundations with approximately 50 sites, and Jewish foundations with 20 sites, as well as Syriac, Chaldean, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian, and Maronite foundations. The GDF also regulates historic Muslim charitable religious foundations, including schools, hospitals, and orphanages.

In 1936, the Government required all foundations to declare their sources of income. In 1974, amid political tensions over Cyprus, the High Court of Appeals ruled that the minority foundations had no right to acquire properties beyond those listed in the 1936 declarations.

The court's ruling launched a process, which continued during the period covered by this report, under which the state has seized control of properties acquired after 1936. The law also allows the state to expropriate properties in areas where the local non-Muslim population drops significantly. Minority religious groups, particularly the Greek and Armenian Orthodox communities, have lost numerous properties to the state in the past and continued to fight ongoing efforts by the state to expropriate properties.

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. Foundations have also been unable to acquire legal ownership of properties registered under names of third parties, including properties registered under the names of saints or archangels, during periods when foundations could not own property in their own name.

Government authorities do not interfere in matters of doctrine pertaining to non-Muslim religions, nor do they restrict the publication or use of religious literature among members of the religion.

There are legal restrictions against insulting any religion recognized by the Government, interfering with that religion's services, or debasing its property.

Alevis freely practiced their beliefs and have built "cem houses" (places of gathering), although cem houses have no legal status as places of worship. Representatives of Alevi organizations maintained that they often faced obstacles when attempting to establish cem houses. They said there were approximately one hundred cem houses in the country, a number that they claimed was insufficient to meet their needs.

Alevis in the Kartal district of Istanbul continued to fight a court battle against a decision by local authorities to deny them permission to build a cem house. In January 2005, Alevis in the Cankaya district of Ankara applied to acquire property to open a cem house. Municipal authorities consulted the Diyanet, which issued a letter stating that Alevis in Cankaya did not need a cem house because they could worship at a local mosque. Also in January 2005, the Diyanet issued a letter to au-

thorities in the Sultanbeyli district of Istanbul stating that cem houses violate Islamic principles and Turkish law.

In May 2006, authorities in the Istanbul municipality of Sultanbeyli reportedly halted 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.

The Diyanet covers the utility costs of registered mosques, but not of cem houses and other places of worship that are not officially recognized. In May 2006, Diyanet President Ali Bardakoglu said the Diyanet could not provide such support to cem houses as it did not have funds for "supporting mystical worship."

Many Alevis alleged discrimination in the Government's failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools. They also charged a bias in the Diyanet, which does not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership.

The constitution establishes compulsory religious and moral instruction in primary and secondary schools. Religious minorities are exempted. However, some religious minorities—such as Protestants—faced difficulty obtaining exemptions, particularly if their identification cards did not specifically list membership in a minority religion. The Government claims that the religion courses cover the range of world religions; however, religious minorities said the courses reflected 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 (ECHR), charging that the mandatory religion courses violate religious freedom; the case is ongoing. In a June 2004 report, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance recommended that the Government either make the courses optional, or revise the content so that they genuinely and fairly cover all religions.

In April 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; in May, however, a higher court overturned the ruling on appeal.

Officially recognized religious minorities may operate schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Such schools are required to appoint a Muslim as deputy principal; reportedly, these deputies have more authority than their nominal supervisors. The curriculum of these schools includes Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jewish instruction.

The Caferis, the country's principal Shi'a community, numbering between 500 thousand 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, state policy imposes some restrictions on religious groups and on religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities.

Secularists in the military, judiciary, and other branches of the bureaucracy continued to wage campaigns against what they label as proponents of Islamic fundamentalism. These groups view religious fundamentalism as a threat to the secular state. The National Security Council (NSC) categorizes religious fundamentalism as a threat to public safety. President Sezer delivered a speech in April 2006 in which he listed separatism and religious fundamentalism as threats facing the country. The president said that the "fundamentalist threat has reached a dangerous level" and that "Turkey's best protection against this threat is its secular order."

According to Mazlum-Der and other groups, some government ministries have dismissed or barred from promotion civil servants suspected of anti-state or Islamist activities. Reports by Mazlum-Der, the media, and others indicated that the military sometimes dismisses religiously observant Muslims from military service. Such dismissals were based on behavior that military officials believed identified these individuals as Islamic fundamentalists; they were concerned that such behavior 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 sometimes dismissed for maintaining ties to Islamic fundamentalist organizations, despite repeated warnings from superior officers.

Mystical Sufi and other religious-social orders (tarikats) and lodges (cemaats) have been banned officially since the mid-1920s; however, tarikats and cemaats remain active and widespread. Some prominent political and social leaders continue to associate with tarikats, cemaats, and other Islamic communities.

Under the law, religious services may take place only in designated places of worship. Municipal codes mandate that only the Government can designate a place of worship, and, if a religion has no legal standing in the country, it may not be eligible for a designated site. Non-Muslim religious services, especially for religious groups that do not own property recognized by the 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.

The law 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 one month to one year, or three months to two 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 activities. The Government does not recognize the ecumenical status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, acknowledging him only as the head of the country's dwindling Greek Orthodox community. High-level government leaders often assert publicly that use of the term "ecumenical" in reference to the patriarch violates the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. However, government officials privately acknowledge that Lausanne does not address the issue.

As a result, the Government has long maintained that only citizens of the country can be members of the Church's Holy Synod and participate in patriarchal elections. However, in 2004, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I appointed six non-Turkish-citizen metropolitans to the Holy Synod, representing the first time in the eighty-year history of the country that noncitizens had been appointed to the body. The Government did not formally respond to the appointments.

Members of the Greek Orthodox community said the legal restrictions threatened the survival of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul because, with fewer than 2,500 Greek Orthodox left in the country, the community was becoming too small 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 state nationalized all private institutions of higher learning. 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 have been permitted to assume leadership positions in some cases, but in general all religious community leaders, including patriarchs and chief rabbis, must be citizens.

In April 2005, the Patriarchate filed an appeal with the ECHR concerning the GDF's expropriation of an orphanage on the Prince's Islands that had belonged to the Patriarchate. There were no new developments in the case.

The Armenian Orthodox community continued a legal battle against the Government's expropriation of properties belonging to the Yedikule Surp Pirgic Armenian Hospital Foundation in Istanbul. In March 2005, the Treasury attempted to sell a building expropriated from the foundation 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 regard proselytizing and religious activism with suspicion. Police occasionally bar Christians from handing out religious literature. Proselytizing is often considered socially unacceptable; Christians performing missionary work are sometimes beaten and insulted. If the proselytizers are foreigners, they may be deported, but generally they are able to reenter the country. Police officers may report students who meet with Christian missionaries to their families or to university authorities.

By the end of the reporting period, there was no verdict in the trial proceedings in the case of three members of the Nationalist Movement Party who severely beat Yakup Cindilli, a convert to Christianity, for distributing New Testaments in Bursa Province in 2003.

Authorities continued to enforce a long-term ban on the wearing of headscarves at universities and by civil servants in public buildings. Women who wear headscarves and persons who actively show support for those who defy the ban have been disciplined or have lost their jobs in the public sector as nurses and teachers.

Students who wear head coverings are officially not permitted to register for classes, although some faculty members permit students to wear head coverings in class.

Many secularists accuse Islamists of using advocacy for wearing the headscarf as a political tool and say they fear that efforts to repeal the headscarf ban will lead to pressure against women who choose not to wear a head covering.

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 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 ruling, killing Judge Mustafa Yucel Ozbilgin and wounding four other judges. Arslan, who was apprehended at the scene, reportedly said he was motivated by anger over the ruling. Thousands of protestors attending Ankara funeral ceremonies for Ozbilgin accused government leaders of inciting the attack by criticizing the headscarf ban and the Council of State ruling. There were no similar protests in other cities.

In another February 2006 ruling, the Council of State upheld a decision by the Education Ministry to deny the application of religion instructor Abdullah Yilmaz to be assigned to a position in Central Asia because Yilmaz's wife wears a headscarf.

A 1997 law made eight years of secular education compulsory. After completing the eight years, students may pursue study at imam hatip (Islamic preacher) high schools, which cover both the standard high school curriculum and Islamic theology and practice. Imam hatip schools are classified as vocational, and graduates of vocational schools face an automatic reduction in their university entrance exam grades if they apply for university programs outside their field of high school specialization. This reduction effectively bars imam hatip graduates from enrolling in university programs other than theology. Many pious 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 December 2005, the Education Ministry issued a regulation allowing imam hatip students to earn degrees from regular high schools by taking distance learning courses. However, the Higher Education Council objected to the regulation, and, in February 2006, the Council of State suspended the regulation pending a final ruling.

Only the Diyanet is authorized to provide religion courses outside of school, although clandestine private courses do exist. Students who complete five 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 twelve 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.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported continuing official harassment of their worship services because they were not members of an officially recognized religion. Jehovah's Witnesses continued to engage in a legal battle over their efforts to form an association.

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. Groups are prohibited from using funds from their properties in one part of the country to support their existing population in another part of the country.

Religious affiliation is listed on national identity cards. Some religious groups, such as the Baha'i, are unable to state their religion on their cards because their religion is not included among the options; they have made their concerns known to the Government. 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, it appeared that the Government may restrict applicants' choice of religion; members of the Baha'i community said government officials had told them that, despite the new law, they would 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 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 January 2006, the ECHR ruled against the country in a case involving conscientious objector Murat Ulke. The court determined that Ulke, who had been imprisoned for refusing to carry out his military service, had suffered ill-treatment.

At the end of the reporting period, court proceedings continued in the Istanbul trial of sixty-nine suspects charged in connection with the November 2003 terrorist bombings of two synagogues, the British consulate, and a bank.

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 the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In April 2006, Roman Catholic authorities reopened the Bebekli Church in Adana for Sunday services. Catholic leaders had closed the church in September 2005 because local authorities had failed to enforce zoning regulations requiring a ten-meter offset around the church building, and noise from an adjacent wedding hall had been interfering with church services. In April, local Catholic officials thanked municipal authorities for discontinuing the operating license of the wedding hall.

In June 2006, officials in the Tasdelen municipality of Istanbul allocated land to an Alevi organization for the construction of a cem house. Members of the Alevi community said the decision marked the first time a cem house had been officially recognized as a place of worship, rather than as a cultural center.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally tolerant relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some Muslims, Christians, Baha'is, and 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 religions was socially unacceptable and sometimes dangerous. A variety of newspapers and television shows regularly published and broadcasted anti-Christian messages, and government officials asserted that missionary activity was a threat to the state and was not covered under the concept of religious freedom.

Religious pluralism was widely viewed as a threat to Islam and to "national unity." Nationalist sentiments sometimes contained anti-Christian or anti-Semitic overtones. Some in the Jewish community reported growing feelings of insecurity in the wake of the 2003 attacks in Istanbul, and certain media outlets promoted anti-Semitic propaganda, including allegations that the Jewish community aided and even orchestrated the Kurdish nationalist movement.

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.

In February 2006, an assailant shot and killed Catholic priest Andrea Santaro in a church in Trabzon. A witness said the gunman shouted "God is great" as he shot Santaro from behind. A sixteen-year-old was charged in the case; his trial was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. The suspect reportedly told police he was angry about the caricatures of Muhammad that had been published in a Danish newspaper. Prime Minister Erdogan and other government officials condemned the killing.

Also in February, 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."

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.

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.

In May 2006, Greek Orthodox Christians held a mass at a historical church in Bergama. A group of nationalist and leftist protestors attempted to disrupt the mass with loud slogans and music. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, who attended the mass, thanked local officials for authorizing the event.

Members of the Syriac community said local villagers, particularly village guards, often occupied the homes of Syriacs who fled the country, refusing to leave when Syriacs attempted to return. The village guards are a civil defense force of approximately 57,000, mostly in the southeast. They were reputed to be the least disciplined of the security forces.

According to the Syriac community, more than fifty unoccupied Syriac homes have been destroyed in the village of Bardakci, Mardin province, since 2000. The majority of the village's Syriac residents fled the region in the mid-1980s. One of the village's two Syriac churches was converted into a mosque without consulting the Syriac community. Some returning Syriacs claimed that government authorities reclassified properties while the Syriacs were out of the country in ways that caused them to lose some of their lands.

Trial proceedings continued in the appeal of Kerim Akbas, who was convicted in 2004 for television broadcasts inciting violence against Christians.

Members of the secular establishment fear the influence of Islamism and reject the involvement of even moderate Islam in politics.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The ambassador and other mission officials, including staff of the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul and the U.S. Consulate in Adana, 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 2005, the U.S. charge d'affaires addressed an Istanbul conference on interfaith dialogue organized by the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. Speaking to an international audience representing diverse religions, she emphasized the importance of religious freedom and the need for leaders of all faiths to stand up against terrorism.

The mission collaborated with the Gaziantep American Corner, the Gaziantep Rotary Club, and the Anatolian Journalists Union in organizing a photo exhibit in June 2005 on religious diversity in the country that helped to engage attendees in dialogue about issues important to the country's continued democratic development.

The mission sponsored a series of presentations on religion in the United States by Wilfred McClay, professor of history at the University of Tennessee, in March 2006. McClay addressed audiences of students, faculty, theologians, opinion makers, and others in Istanbul, Bursa, and Ankara, including at the ambassador's residence. He explained the basic assumptions that underpin the U.S. Constitution as part of his discussion of secularism in the United States.

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. During introductory calls in Istanbul, he met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, Chief Rabbi Isak Haleva, and Armenian Orthodox Patriarch Mesrob II to show support for religious freedom and to discuss issues affecting their respective communities.

Other embassy officers held similar meetings with government officials. 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 mission utilizes the International Visitor Program to introduce professionals in various fields to the United States and American counterparts. Religious issues are included among these programs.

UKRAINE

The 1996 constitution and the 1991 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. Religious groups of all beliefs flourished; however, some local officials impeded attempts by minority and nontraditional religious groups to register and to buy or lease property.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Registration and property restitution problems remained; however, the Government continued to facilitate the return of some communal properties.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were some exceptions, particularly among leaders of rival branches of the same faith. There were isolated cases of anti-Semitism and anti-Islamism. The All-Ukraine Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (All-Ukraine Council), an influential, interconfessional government advisory body; the Conference of Representatives of Christian Churches of Ukraine; and the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches each provided a forum to enhance coordination between various denominations, resolve disputes and discuss relevant legislation. As of June 1, 2006, the Council of Evangelical Protestant Churches, established in 2005, had eight members representing 80 percent of the country's Protestant organizations.

The U.S. Government 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 233 thousand square miles and a population of 47 million. Estimates of those who considered themselves believers varied widely. A 2003 nationwide survey by a major independent think tank, the Razumkov Center, found that 75.2 percent of the respondents considered themselves believers, 37.4 percent said they attended church, and 21.9 percent said they did not believe in God. As of January 1, 2006, there were 30,507 registered religious organizations, including 29,262 religious communities; the Government estimated that there were approximately 1,679 unregistered religious communities. More than 90 percent of religiously active citizens were Christians, the majority Orthodox. Religious practice was generally strongest in the western part of the country.

In 2004 the national newspaper Den (The Day) published the results of a major poll on religious beliefs by the All-Ukraine Sociological Service. Of the respondents who identified themselves as believers, 50.44 percent said they belonged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)-Kiev Patriarchate; 26.13 percent to the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate; 8.02 percent to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (sometimes referred to as the Uniate, Byzantine, or Eastern Rite Church); 7.21 percent to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; 2.19 percent belonged to the Roman Catholic Church; 2.19 percent identified themselves as Protestants; 0.63 percent responded that they observed Jewish religious practices; and 3.2 percent said they belonged to "other denominations."

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC–MP) had 35 eparchies and 10,875 communities (approximately 68 percent of all Orthodox Christian communities in the country), most of which were located in the central, southern, and eastern oblasts. Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) of Kiev headed the denomination within the country. The UOC–MP, which had 9,072 clergy members, referred to itself as The Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev Patriarchate (UOC–KP) was formed after independence and has been headed since 1995 by Patriarch Filaret (Denysenko), who was once the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine. The UOC–KP had 31 eparchies, 3,721 communities, and 2,816 clergy members. Approximately 60 percent of the UOC–KP faithful lived in the western part of the country. The UOC–KP was not recognized by the UOC–MP.

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) was the smallest of the three Orthodox churches in the country; it was founded in 1919 in Kiev. Banned during the Soviet era, it was legalized in 1989 and had 12 eparchies and 1,166 communities, approximately 70 percent of them in the western part of the country. The UAOC had 686 clergy members. In the interest of the possible future unification of the country's Orthodox churches, it did not name a patriarch to succeed the late Patriarch Dmitriy. The UAOC was formally headed in the country by Metropolitan

Mefodiy of Ternopil and Podil; however, the large eparchies of Kharkiv-Poltava, Lviv, Rivne-Volyn, and Tavriya have officially broken relations with Mefodiy and have asked to be placed under the direct jurisdiction of Istanbul-based Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

The adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) constituted the second largest group of believers after the Christian Orthodox churches. The Council of Brest formed the Church in 1596 to unify Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers. Outlawed by the Soviet Union in 1946 and legalized in 1989, the UGCC was for forty-three years the single largest banned religious community in the world. The UGCC had 18 eparchies, 3,433 communities, and 2,136 clergy members. The UGCC's members, who constituted a majority of the believers in western Ukraine, numbered approximately four million.

The Roman Catholic Church is traditionally associated with historical pockets of citizens of Polish ancestry who lived mainly in the central and western regions. The Roman Catholic Church had 7 dioceses, 879 communities, and 499 clergy members serving approximately one million persons.

Protestant Churches have grown rapidly in the years since independence. The Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine (the Baptist Union) was the largest group, claiming more than 500 thousand members in more than 3 thousand churches. The Baptist Union had 3,106 clergy members. Other growing communities included Anglicans, Calvinists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutherans, Methodists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, and others.

The Jewish community has a long history in the country. Estimates of the size of the current Jewish population varied. According to a 2001 census, the State Committee of Statistics estimated that there were 103,600 Jews in the country. Some Jewish community leaders, however, said the Jewish population could be as high as 300 thousand. The 2004 All-Ukraine Sociological Service poll appeared to corroborate the higher figure. Observers believed that 35 to 40 percent of the Jewish population was active communally; there were 240 registered Jewish organizations. Most observant Jews were Orthodox. There were 104 Chabad-Lubavitch communities in the country. The Progressive (Reform) Jewish movement had forty-eight communities.

Some Muslim leaders estimated that there were 2,000,000 Muslims in the country, although estimates by the government and independent think tanks were substantially lower, approximately 500,000. There were 457 registered Muslim communities, 320 of them on the Crimean peninsula. Sheikh Akhmed Tamim, the mufti of Ukraine, was a member of the All-Ukraine Council. According to Sheikh Tamim, approximately 50,000 Muslims, mostly foreign, lived in Kiev. The majority of the country's Muslims were Crimean Tatars, who were forcibly deported from Crimea to Uzbekistan by Stalin in 1944; they were permitted to return to the country in 1989. There were approximately 300,000 Crimean Tatars in Ukraine; 267,000 lived on the peninsula.

The Government estimated that there were more than fifteen nontraditional religious movements in the country. As of January 1, 2006, twenty-nine Krishna Consciousness communities and forty-seven Buddhist communities were registered.

According to the Government, as of January 1, 2006, there were 175 theological educational institutions with 9,721 full-time and 10,727 correspondence students. Foreign religious workers were active in many religious groups. The Government estimated that approximately 51 percent of priests in the Roman Catholic community were foreign citizens. Foreign religious workers also played a particularly active role in Protestant and Mormon communities, where missionary activity was central to community growth. The Jewish community also depended on foreign religious workers, since many rabbis were not citizens.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The 1996 constitution and the 1991 law on freedom of conscience provide for freedom of religion. The Government generally sought at all levels to protect this right and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. However, some minority and nontraditional religious groups experienced difficulties in registration and in buying and leasing property.

There is no formal state religion; however, the UOC–MP and the UGCC tended to dominate in the east and west of the country, respectively. Local authorities frequently sided with the religious majority in a particular region. In many areas of the east and south they tended to side with the UOC–MP. For example, according to representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Odesa city council, at the urg-

ing of local UOC–MP leaders, greatly restricted the work of the Catholic charity Caritas with street children. Conversely, in the western part of the country, local authorities often supported the UGCC and UOC–KP.

On March 22, 2006, President Yushchenko called for the creation of a unified Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which the UOC–MP and major Protestant denominations opposed. The UOC–MP publicly cautioned the president against "politicizing" and "artificially" speeding up the unification process.

The courts do not always interpret the law in a manner that protects religious freedom, often siding with the dominant local religious organization. For example, in a case that received national and international media and nongovernmental organization (NGO) attention, a local court in Cherkasy Oblast exonerated a UOC–MP priest of assault and hate crime charges for beating six members of Jehovah's Witnesses with his walking stick. The priest admitted that he beat the persons and publicly boasted that he would "do it again," claiming that the six came onto his property and pushed him. The Jehovah's Witnesses also reported that two female Jehovah's Witnesses were attacked in Donetsk Region. According to the Witnesses, police refused to file a complaint under Article 161 (religious enmity) of the criminal code.

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 national organization and to have at least ten adult members in order to obtain the status of a "juridical entity." Registration is necessary to conduct many day-to-day business activities including publishing, banking, and property transactions. By law, the registration process should take one month, or three months if the Government requests an expert opinion on the group's legitimacy. Registration denials may be appealed in court.

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. During the period covered by this report, most buildings and objects subject to restitution were those immediately necessary for religious worship. Communities must apply to regional authorities for property restitution. While consideration of a restitution claim should be completed within a month, it frequently takes much longer.

Intracommunal competition for particular properties complicated restitution claims for the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities. 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. Some groups asserted that there was progress in the restitution of property, while others reported little or no progress. Many properties for which restitution was being sought were occupied by state institutions or were historic landmarks. All major religious organizations called on the Government to establish a transparent legal process to address restitution claims.

The registration process is administered by the Ministry of Justice's State Department for Religious Issues (SDRI), the successor organization to the Soviet-legacy State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA), which was abolished in April 2005 by presidential decree. Representatives of most major religious organizations, NGOs, and think tanks, who generally viewed the SCRA as an antiquated, corrupt, Soviet-style organization, cautiously welcomed the decision. According to the Government, the creation of SDRI was intended to "take the politics" out of the registration process and bring the law into conformity with European norms. However, some major religious organizations criticized the move, noting that the SCRA, while flawed, played a valuable role as the religious community's voice in the Government, helping to mediate disputes between religious organizations and various government agencies. Some observers noted that the SDRI, which was establishing its position in relation to regional departments of religious issues, lacked sufficient power over oblast and municipal level departments.

Mormon leaders asserted that during the period covered by this report, the Chernivtsi municipal government refused to permit the registration of a Mormon community.

The Autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church in America asserted that the SDRI refused to register the organization, a charge the SDRI denied.

Muslim representatives in Kiev and Crimea noted that they have had difficulty registering communities. In Kharkiv Oblast, the government for the past twelve years repeatedly refused to register a Muslim community. Islamic community leaders also expressed frustration with the Ministry of Education, which had not registered an Islamic school.

The law restricts the activities of foreign-based religious organizations and narrowly defines the permissible activities of members of the clergy, preachers, teachers, and other noncitizen representatives of foreign-based religious organizations; however, in practice there were no reports that the Government used the law to limit the activity of such religious organizations. Religious worker visas require invitations from registered religious organizations in the country and the approval of the Government. Foreign religious workers may preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities "only in those religious organizations that invited them to Ukraine and with official approval of the governmental body that registered the statutes and the articles of the pertinent religious organization." In 2005, 8,349 foreigners were issued visas for religious work; approximately 3,500 of those visas were issued to clergymen who intended to preach or do long-term missionary work. According to the Government, no visa applications by foreign religious workers were rejected during the period covered by this report.

Under the law, religion cannot be part of the public school curriculum. However, President Yushchenko, with the support of the country's four top Christian clergymen, instructed the Ministry of Education to introduce "ethics of faith" training courses into public school curricula beginning September 1, 2005. According to the SDRI, prominent religious leaders, and the media, nationwide implementation had been haphazard. In some schools in the eastern part of the country, students study the "ethics of faith" but also continue to take an "ethics" course developed in Soviet times based on atheist doctrine. In Kharkiv Oblast, fifth-year students may elect to study Christian ethics, but only with their parents' consent. While Jewish leaders support the teaching of ethics and civics in school, they have insisted on a nonsectarian approach to the training. Schools run by religious communities may, and do, include religious education as an extracurricular activity.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding by frequently consulting with the All-Ukraine Council, whose membership represents the religious groups of more than 90 percent of the religiously active population. The council, which has a rotating chairmanship, meets once every two or three months, providing members and government representatives the opportunity to discuss interfaith concerns. The council has also provided a forum through which religious organizations can consult with the Government on relevant draft legislation. President Yushchenko met with the council on March 3, 2006. Oblast state administrations and local religious leaders in most regions of the country have formed oblast councils of churches and religious organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Mormon leaders in Kiev complained about the Government's unwillingness to allow a Mormon representative to join the All-Ukraine Council. They argued that the refusal denied their organization the appearance of legitimacy and discouraged broadcast media outlets from allowing the Mormons to purchase airtime.

Representatives of the UOC–KP, the UAOC, the UGCC, and the Roman Catholic Church alleged that local governments in the south and east favored the UOC–MP in matters of property restitution and registration. Representatives from the UOC–KP specifically complained that the Odesa and Poltava oblast governments deliberately delayed the registration of congregations that, in accordance with the law, had changed jurisdictions from the UOC–MP to the UOC–KP.

Representatives of progressive Jewish communities noted that the government of Dnipropetrovsk Oblast permitted only the registration of Chabad Jewish communities and complained about property restitution difficulties with the Kharkiv municipal government.

Senior leaders of the UOC–MP complained that, in the wake of the 2004 Orange Revolution and the election of President Yushchenko, the UOC–MP had been discriminated against by the Rivne, Ternopil, and Lviv oblast governments. UOC–MP representatives asserted that local officials and UOC–KP supporters in Rivne Oblast threatened UOC–MP clergy and their family members.

Greek Catholic Cardinal Husar, as well as prominent members of the country's Jewish community, continued to call on the Government to amend the education law, which prohibits religious organizations, such as the UGCC, from establishing and running primary and secondary schools.

According to Roman Catholic Bishop Bronislav Bernatsky, the Odesa municipal government, acting at the behest of the UOC–MP, restricted the training of Roman Catholic priests for the diocese of Odesa-Simferopol. Specifically, the municipal government refused to authorize the restitution of Odesa's Roman Catholic seminary, which was confiscated by the Soviet regime, and criticized Bishop Bernatsky for having "too many foreign priests" in the diocese.

There is no chaplain corps in the military. However, members of the armed forces have regular access to religious services, and many military units have priests. Christian symbols and ceremonies are routinely used in the armed forces.

The Government continued to facilitate the building of houses of worship. As of January 1, 2006, religious organizations in the country were using 21,075 places of worship, of which approximately 6,200 were rented. As of January 1, 2006, 2,420 religious buildings were under construction. During the period 1992–2004, government funds and donations were used to construct 4,398 places of worship. Representatives of the Jewish and Baptist communities have complained, however, that state funds were allocated only for Orthodox church buildings. The Government had not allocated funds for the construction or reconstruction of synagogues, for example.

Members of numerous communities described difficulties in dealing with the municipal administrations in Kiev and other large cities to obtain land and building permits. These problems, however, were not limited to religious groups.

Representatives of the UGCC complained of discrimination by the Odesa municipal government, which blocked the Church's efforts to obtain land in the city.

Evangelical Protestant leaders expressed concern about discrimination by the Kherson and Odesa regional and municipal governments and complained about interference with religious services, refusal to sell property to build churches, and failure to protect Church property rights.

Leaders of the All-Ukraine Baptist Union complained about the prosecutor general's effort to seize the Union's headquarters building in downtown Kiev. Baptist Union officials could not rule out the possibility that the prosecutor general's action was linked to domestic politics, as one influential politician was a prominent Baptist minister.

Despite requests from the Roman Catholic Church, including the late pope, John Paul II, the Government had not transferred its ownership of St. Nicholas' Cathedral and a former residence of Roman Catholic bishops in Kiev to the Church. The Church was, however, permitted to use the cathedral for daily morning Mass, on weekends, and during major religious holidays. Roman Catholic representatives also expressed frustration about unrealized restitution claims in Chernivtsi, Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Mykolayiv, Sevastopol, and Simferopol.

There was no progress in the resolution of the high-profile and long-running dispute over inappropriate use of a Jewish cemetery in the Volyn Oblast town of Volodymyr-Volynsky. In 2002 a local court ordered a halt in the construction of an apartment building on the site of the cemetery. However, according to the Volodymyr-Volynsky municipal council, apartment construction was completed during 2003, and most of the units were occupied. 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 Government's slow pace of communal property restitution undermined the authority of moderate Muslim leaders. For example, they argued that Muslims—particularly in Crimea—were more willing to listen to strident Islamist views, especially those espoused by Crimean Tatar followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which advocated the establishment of an international Islamic state. 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, and the ruins of an 18th-century mosque in the Crimean coastal city of Alushta.

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

There were a number of acts of anti-Semitism during the period covered by this report; at least four of them involved physical attacks. On August 28, 2005, a group of skinheads assaulted two yeshiva students in Kiev. One of the students had his skull partially crushed with a beer bottle. On August 31, 2005, police arrested three of the alleged assailants, who were charged with criminal hooliganism. On September 1, 2005, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Henady Moskal told the press that the attack was not motivated by anti†Semitism, an assertion that was publicly questioned by prominent members of the Jewish community. President Yushchenko publicly condemned the assault.

On September 11, 2005, a group of skinheads assaulted a rabbi and his son in Kiev. Police detained a group of suspects; two were charged with criminal hooliganism. On December 12, 2005, the country's correspondent of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency was severely beaten by unidentified assailants; as of June 1, 2006, the police investigation remained ongoing.

On February 3, 2006, a man stormed into the Brodsky Synagogue in downtown Kiev and demanded to see the rabbi. Security guards found a knife on the man, and police arrested him. On March 6, 2006, a yeshiva student used an air-pellet gun to fend off four men on a Kiev subway train who kicked him to the ground while shouting anti-Semitic insults. The student shot one of the assailants in the face with the pellet gun, which he had purchased following the August 28, 2005, attack referenced above. The assailants were arrested at the scene. On April 21, 2006, a group of skinheads beat and stabbed an Israeli yeshiva student in Dnipropetrovsk; the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced on May 5, 2006, that a criminal case of hooliganism would be brought against the assailants. The ministry also noted that prosecutors were continuing to examine the motives behind the attack, which could lead to additional "interethnic hostility" charges.

Police in Simferopol continued to investigate a January 2005 incident in which a group of skinheads assaulted thirteen students from a Chabad Jewish day school, including two girls who required hospitalization.

There were no indications that the police were investigating assaults on two rabbis in 2004 in Odesa and on a yeshiva student in Donetsk. Similarly, there was no progress reported in police investigations into two separate 2004 attacks on rabbis near Kiev's Brodsky Synagogue.

There were also several instances in which synagogues, cemeteries, and Holocaust memorials were vandalized, particularly in Sevastopol, Dnipropetrovsk, and Odesa; police follow-up often appeared to be ineffectual, especially in Dnipropetrovsk. However, there was an effective official response in other cases. For example, the Security Service of Ukraine on June 6, 2006, detained a suspect in the March 23, 2006, desecration of a Holocaust memorial in Sevastopol. In addition, four neo-Nazis were sentenced February 7, 2005, for vandalizing gravestones in a cemetery in the Donetsk Oblast in 2004. The court issued suspended sentences for the two adult defendants and ordered "compulsory educational measures" under parental supervision for two juveniles. According to media reports, the local Jewish community requested light sentences for the vandals, who came from extremely poor families. In Rivne, municipal authorities restored the Sosonky memorial, which was desecrated in 2004.

There were no indications that police were investigating the vandalism of several dozen tombstones in 2004 at Jewish and Christian burial sites in Kiev's Kurenivske Cemetery.

Despite continued mediation efforts by local Jewish and Greek Catholic leaders, a long-standing dispute between nationalists and Jews over the erection of crosses in an old Jewish cemetery in Sambir remained unresolved. On May 3, 2006, the Supreme Administrative Court of Ukraine rejected an appeal by the Union of Councils of Soviet Jewry to take ownership of the cemetery.

Anti-Semitism was also evident in public life. For example, on August 8, 2005, the fringe Ukrainian Conservative Party, associated with the anti-Semitic Inter-Regional Academy of Personnel Management (known by its Ukrainian acronym MAUP), ostensibly an academic institution seen by many as a diploma mill, published an "open letter" to President Yushchenko calling for the criminal prosecution of Hasidic Rabbis for "the dissemination in Ukraine of Judeo-Nazi teachings."

In the March 26, 2006, parliamentary elections, the Ukrainian Conservative Party received only 0.09 percent of the national vote. Despite an intensive advertising campaign, the party failed the win the necessary 3 percent to be represented in Parliament.

Anti-Semitic articles appeared frequently in small publications and irregular newsletters, although such articles rarely appeared in the national press.

MAUP, which receives significant funding from several Middle Eastern government sources, remained the most persistent anti-Semitic presence in the country. It published a monthly journal Personnel and a weekly newspaper Personnel Plus, which was the subject of an ongoing criminal investigation by the Prosecutor General's Office. According to Jewish organizations, MAUP accounted for nearly 85 percent of all anti-Semitic material published in the country during the year. On December 5, 2005, President Yushchenko issued a public statement criticizing MAUP for its anti-Semitic publications. The president also issued an executive order barring civil servants from studying or teaching at MAUP branch affiliates and ordered the Ministry of Education to review the licenses of all MAUP affiliates. In March 2006 seven such affiliates, out of approximately fifty across the country, were closed

because of unspecified licensing violations. In a January 23, 2006, national television interview, Foreign Minister Tarasyuk also stressed that "there is no place for any form of anti-Semitism or xenophobia in Ukraine."

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

There were several improvements in respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

On September 23, 2005, President Yushchenko issued a decree ordering educational and research institutions at all levels to strengthen teaching about tolerance and interdenominational understanding. The decree, "On Measures to Fulfill State Policies in the Sphere of International Relations, Religions and Churches," included an order to take immediate steps to resume work of the Interagency Commission set up in 2002, with the primary goal of returning property to religious communities. According to the decree, the Government began preparations to appropriately commemorate the sixty-fifth anniversary of the September 1941 Babyn Yar massacre in Kiev by Nazi forces. On March 15, 2006, the Cabinet of Ministers restarted work of the commission.

On January 20, 2006, the president issued a decree instructing the Ministry of Justice to draft a new version of the Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, improve restitution-related rules and regulations, and extend the basis for granting conscripts the right to alternative (nonmilitary) service.

On March 9, 2006, the chief of the Presidential Secretariat formed a working group to examine matters emerging in church-state relations, prepare proposals to address them, and improve laws pertaining to religious freedom.

On April 4, 2006, the Supreme Rada adopted the amended Law on Military Duty and Military Service granting deferment from military conscription to full-time students of theological schools and their graduates holding clerical posts. The law also grants them exemption from military reserve training.

On April 25, 2006, Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko signed a directive designed to accommodate the religious needs of servicemen and guarantee their constitutional rights of religious freedom. Representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of the Kiev and Moscow Patriarchates, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic Churches, and All-Ukraine Baptist Union actively worked with the Ministry of Defense in drafting the decree.

During the March 2006 parliamentary and local elections, most major religious organizations generally avoided political involvement. For example, rather than backing specific political parties, many senior religious figures urged their congregations to pray for free and fair elections. Human rights organizations noted that this was a major improvement over the 2004 presidential elections, when UOC–MP priests in the eastern part of the country actively campaigned for then prime minister Viktor Yanukovych by reading special prayers on his behalf, urging the faithful to vote for him, and denouncing then opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko as a "servant of the devil."

The Government continued to make progress in returning to religious groups communal properties expropriated during the Soviet era. For example, during the period covered by this report, the Government returned eight Orthodox churches to communities in Kharkiv Oblast, including the Church of the Holy Protection; the Holy Nativity and Holy Cross monasteries in Khmelnytsky Oblast to the UOC–MP; St. John's Roman Catholic Church in Zhytomyr; the Roman Catholic Metropolitan's Residence in Lviv; the German Lutheran Church in Odesa; and, synagogues in Lutsk and Sumy.

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) expressed satisfaction with the Government's handling of a legal dispute between ROCA and the UOC–KP over ownership of the Holy Trinity Church in Odesa Oblast. The dispute was resolved through the courts in ROCA's favor.

The SDRI, 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, met numerous times to develop plans 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 twenty thousand Hasidim traveled to Uman in 2005, the largest number in the country's post-independence history.

In Medzhybizh, (Khmelnytsky Oblast) the city government worked with the local Jewish community to create a new synagogue and pilgrimage center for Hasidic Jews.

In response to requests from local Jewish organizations, the Kirovohrad municipal government banned construction on a Holocaust remembrance site. The local Jewish

community was given permission to build a small memorial and park at the location.

In response to a long-standing complaint from Crimean Tatar leaders, the Bakhchysarai municipal government agreed to relocate the city's central market from the territory of Azyzler, an ancient Muslim cemetery and pilgrimage site for Crimean Tatars. Bakhchysarai's mayor also announced plans to build a museum and memorial complex at the site.

In response to U.S. and EU diplomacy, and efforts by prominent NGOs and international academic institutions, the Ministry of Education on March 9, 2006, reversed its longstanding policy and officially recognized theology as an academic discipline. Prior to the ministry's decision, students majoring in theology were subject to the draft, ineligible for student discounts, and had difficulty finding work in the country because their degrees were not recognized.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, conflicts between local representatives of contending religious organizations in some cases adversely affected broader ties among religious groups in society.

During the period covered by this report, senior leaders of the UOC–MP alleged that supporters of the UOC–KP attacked UOC–MP clergy and seized a number of UOC–MP churches. The UOC–MP cited numerous such incidents, including in Rivne, Ternopil, and Chernivtsi regions, claiming that UOC–KP was emboldened by the success of the 2004 Orange Revolution, the Yushchenko presidency, and indications that the Ecumenical Patriarch might recognize their church as the country's canonical Orthodox Church.

The UOC–KP rejected the allegations, noting that many UOC–MP communities exercised their legal right to change jurisdictions from the UOC–MP to the UOC–KP. Patriarch Filaret asserted that in the Rivne Oblast town of Ostroh on October 27, 2005, UOC–MP priests and supporters from Crimea physically intimidated and humiliated parishioners of the Church of the Holy Ascension, which had legally switched jurisdictions from the UOC–MP to the UOC–KP.

Representatives of the ROCA voiced complaints about the UOC–MP, asserting that the UOC–MP demanded the surrender of ROCA church buildings in Malyn, Zhytomyr Oblast, and pressured local authorities to prevent the registration of a ROCA community in Khotin, Chernivtsi Oblast.

The UOC–MP accused the UGCC of attempting to expand in regions where the Moscow Patriarchate was traditionally strong. The accusation appeared to be based on the UGCC's plans to establish a patriarchate and on the relocation of Cardinal Husar's headquarters from Lviv to Kiev on August 21, 2005, a move which the UOC–MP strongly protested.

Evangelical Protestant leaders complained about the activities of the group "Dialogue," which they and human rights groups characterized as a front for the UOC–MP that promoted hostility toward non-Orthodox Christians.

On February 6, 2006, the Association of Christian Journalists, Publishers, and Broadcasters criticized the STB television network for airing a program that attacked evangelical churches. According to the association, the program misrepresented the beliefs of traditional Protestant Churches (including Lutherans and Baptists) and referred to evangelical Protestants as "Satanists."

At an April 17, 2006, press conference, the president of the major Protestant Christian media group, Serhiy Belbovets, criticized what he called "a series" of television and newspaper reports that characterized evangelical Christians as "fanatics" and "members of sects." He called on all churches in the country to "stand together, shoulder to shoulder, to defend Christian values."

Senior Mormon leaders in Kiev asserted that believers faced discrimination from some government officials and from the UOC–MP and UOC–KP. They expressed concern about efforts by these churches to prevent the establishment of a Mormon community in Chernivtsi. In official correspondence with the city government, local UOC–MP and UOC–KP leaders accused the Mormons of encroaching on an "Orthodox city."

Muslim leaders in Crimea, as well as members of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, the major, but unofficial, organization representing Crimean Tatars, accused the UOC–MP of encouraging anti-Muslim and anti-Tatar violence in Crimea. UOC–MP priests in Crimea reportedly assured ethnic Russian vigilantes, who refer to themselves as Cossacks, that violence against Muslim Tatars was justified in order to "protect Orthodoxy" in Crimea.

Mejlis members and Crimea-based human rights groups continued to criticize the Crimean government for permitting schools to use textbooks that contained inflammatory and historically inaccurate material about Tatar Muslims. Human rights activists specifically noted that a common textbook for fifth graders, Viktor Misan's Stories on the History of Ukraine, contained more than twenty pejorative references to Muslims, including the fallacy that Tatar children had frequently used "elderly and disabled Ukrainian captives for archery and saber practice." Similarly, A.K. Shchvidko's eighth-grade textbook, History of Ukraine, 16–18th Centuries, depicted Muslims in a negative light, erroneously asserting, for example, that "there wasn't a year when Tatars did not invade Ukraine, burn its villages and towns, slaughter its citizens, and take prisoners." One major Crimea-based human rights group noted that such misinformation created an impression among young people that "Tatars are bad for Ukraine and that to kill and rob them is a blessed deed."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government frequently 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 U.S. citizens, and the embassy continued to intervene as necessary to defend their rights to due process under the law.

Embassy officers tracked developments in religious freedom court cases involving different faiths and denominations. For example, the embassy continued to monitor the longstanding Sambir and Volodymyr-Volynsky cemetery cases and also pressed the Prosecutor General's Office for an explanation of its attempt to seize the downtown Kiev headquarters of the Baptist Union.

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.

On numerous occasions, the ambassador raised with senior government officials, including President Yushchenko, the issue of tolerance and combating anti-Semitism. He urged the Government to address the foreign-funded anti-Semitic activities of MAUP and encouraged the Interior Ministry, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the Dnipropetrovsk municipal government to take appropriate actions in response to anti-Semitic incidents. On December 5, 2005, President Yushchenko denounced all expressions of anti-Semitism and xenophobia. He condemned MAUP's systematic publication of anti-Semitic material and urged MAUP's leadership to stop inciting interethnic hatred. In addition, during a January 23, 2006, national television interview, Foreign Minister Tarasyuk stressed that "there is no place for any form of anti-Semitism or xenophobia in Ukraine."

In a July 2005 letter to the Minister of Education, the ambassador argued strongly for the official recognition of theology as a legitimate field of academic study, pointing out the hardships faced by students of theology. On March 9, 2006, the ministry officially recognized theology as an academic discipline, due in part to the embassy's efforts.

During the period covered by this report, embassy officers continued to maintain close contact not only with clerics but also with lay leaders in religious communities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations, such as Caritas, the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, which were active in the country. In addition, the embassy facilitated similar meetings with these groups for members of Congress and other visiting U.S. officials.

Embassy officers also met with Muslim leaders in Kiev and Crimea throughout the period covered by this report in an effort to understand the concerns of those communities. For example, the ambassador attended the April 10, 2006, plenary session of the Congress of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Ukraine, meeting personally with the mufti of Ukraine, Sheikh Akhmed Tamim.

The embassy funded three major International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) groups on advancing religious freedom and promoting tolerance. In September 2005 a trio of legal experts from the Ministry of Justice and the SDRI visited the United States to examine, among other things, how religious organizations are treated under federal, state, and local law, and how cities protect religious heritage sites like cemeteries. In November 2005 a group of prominent clergymen from the major religious groups visited the United States to better understand how interfaith dialogue strengthens tolerance in American society. (A representative from the UOC–MP was invited and encouraged to participate in this IVLP program but declined.) In April 2006 a group of writers and researchers who specialize in the Holo-

caust and Holodomor (Stalinist Terror Famine of 1932–33) visited the United States to examine how the United States remembers and teaches young people about the Holocaust and other tragic events, such as slavery and the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

During the period covered by this report, the embassy approved 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 widely read and widely respected web site. The embassy also provided financial support to Kiev's annual Klezmer (traditional Jewish folk music) festival.

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 respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Centuries-old sectarian divisions and instances of violence persisted in Northern Ireland. The July 7, 2005, terrorist attacks carried out on London's transport system by Muslim suicide bombers acting under what they declared to be religious beliefs have caused the British public and Government to reflect on whether tolerance for religious practices was sufficient to guarantee a civic and civil 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 United Kingdom has an area of 94,525 square miles and a population in mid-2003 of approximately 59.6 million. The 2001 census for the whole of the United Kingdom reported that approximately 42 million persons (almost 72 percent of the population) identified themselves as Christians. Approximately 1.6 million (2.7 percent) identified themselves as Muslims. The next largest religious groups were Hindus (1 percent), Sikhs (0.6 percent), and Jews (0.5 percent). More than 9 million (15.5 percent) respondents stated they had no religion. The census's religion question was voluntary, but only 7.3 percent chose not to respond.

Religious affiliation was not evenly distributed among ethnicities. According to 2001 census data for Great Britain, approximately 70 percent of the white population described themselves as Christians. Almost 75 percent of black Caribbean respondents stated that they were Christians, as did 70 percent of black Africans. Meanwhile, 45 percent of Indians were Hindus, and 29 percent were Sikhs. Approximately 92 percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were Muslims.

Non-Christian populations were concentrated in London and other large urban areas. London was home to 56 percent of Jews, 52 percent of Hindus, 38 percent of Muslims, and 31 percent of Sikhs. Census figures showed that Muslims, as compared to adherents of other religions, had higher rates of unemployment and ill health and lower rates of educational qualifications.

Information on membership in Christian denominations was not recorded in the 2001 census. In 2003, the Office for National Statistics indicated approximately 29 percent of the population identified with Anglicanism, 10 percent with the Roman Catholic Church, and 14 percent with Protestant churches.

In Northern Ireland, the 2001 census showed that 53.1 percent were Protestants and 43.8 percent were Catholics. Overall church attendance in Northern Ireland was estimated at 30 to 35 percent. The divisions between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland have largely evolved along religious lines. The policy of the Government remained one of promotion of religious tolerance.

Most Catholics and Protestants continued to live in segregated communities in Northern Ireland, including public housing ("housing estates") and other working class areas, although many middle class neighborhoods were mixed communities. Intimidation by paramilitary gangs often resulted in members of the local-minority community leaving housing estates, which increased the level of segregation.

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 law provides for the freedom to change one's religion or belief. The 1998 Human Rights Act guarantees freedom of religion and bans discrimination based on religion. Religious discrimination in employment and vocational training was made illegal by the 2003 Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations. The 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act covers "religiously aggravated offenses," based on existing assault, harassment, criminal damage, and public order offenses. Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" (i.e., where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime) face higher maximum penalties. According to the Crown Prosecution Service's Racist Incident Monitoring Annual Report covering the period of April 2004 to May 2005, twenty-seven of thirty-four defendants were prosecuted for religiously aggravated offenses under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act in England and Wales. In twenty-three of the offenses, the actual or perceived religion of the victim was Islam.

On February 16, 2006, the Government enacted the Racial and Religious Hatred Act and the Equality Act applicable throughout Great Britain. The Racial and Religious Hatred Act amended the Public Order Act of 1986 by creating new offenses for stirring up hatred against persons on religious grounds. The Act defined "religious hatred" as hatred against a group of persons defined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief. The act does not seek to define what amounts to a religion or a religious belief, leaving it to the courts to make such determinations.

Offenses under the act must be threatening and intended to stir up religious hatred based on: 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's provisions are not intended to restrict freedom of speech and criticism of religions or lack of religion. The act does not apply where words or behavior are used or displayed inside a private dwelling and cannot be seen or heard by others outside. The maximum penalty for stirring up religious hatred is seven years in prison.

This act also amended the Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 1984, giving only constables the power to arrest persons in the context of these offenses, rather than allowing "citizens' arrests."

The Equality Act made 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) for Great Britain, 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. The CEHR's remit is slightly different for Scotland, where it covers only human rights matters reserved to Westminster. Human rights for matters "devolved" to the Scottish Parliament are covered by the Scottish Commission for Human Rights. The Equality Act does allow the CEHR to cover devolved matters if it has the agreement of the proposed Scottish Commission.

There are two established (or state) churches: The Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). The monarch is the "Supreme Governor" of the Church of England and always must be a member of the Church and promise to uphold it. The monarch's connection with the Church of England is the subject of ongoing public debate. In 2003, a nongovernmental Commission on the Future of the Monarchy called for the Queen to be stripped of the title of Supreme Governor.

The monarch appoints Church of England officials on the advice of the prime minister and the Crown Appointments Commission, which includes lay and clergy representatives. The 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. A February 2001 Home Office study suggested that the establishment status of the Church of England causes "religious disadvantage" to other religious communities. Those who believe that their freedom of religion has been infringed upon have the right to appeal to the courts for relief.

The Government indicated it had no plans to move towards disestablishment of the Church of England unless both the Church and the public favored such a move; furthermore, the Government took the view that establishment was deeply embedded in the nation's history and in no way indicated a lack of respect for other faiths. Official events took an inclusive approach; for example, the national Remembrance Day Service, conducted under the auspices of the Church of England, also included representatives of a broad range of faiths. 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 British Muslims on pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia.

After the July 7, 2005, terrorist attacks against London's transport system, the Government launched an effort to create "task forces" together with members of the Muslim communities to set an agenda which would help those communities counter extremism and radicalization leading to violence.

Holy days that are considered national holidays include Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. No church or religious organization—established or otherwise—receives direct funding from the state. Religious bodies are expected to finance their own activities through endowment, investments, and fund-raising. The Government funds the repair of historic religious buildings, such as cathedrals and churches, but such funding is not restricted to Church of England buildings. A government grants program, financed largely through lottery money, helps to fund repair and maintenance of listed places of worship of all religious groups nationwide. The Government also contributes to the budget of the Church Conservation Trust, which preserves "redundant" Church of England buildings of architectural or historic significance. Several similar groups in England, Scotland, and Wales repair non-Anglican houses of worship.

Most religious institutions are classified as charities and, as such, enjoy a wide range of tax benefits. (The advancement of religion is considered to be a charitable purpose.) In England and Wales, the Charity Commission reviews the application of each body applying for registration as a charity. Commissioners base their decisions on a substantial body of case law. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Inland Revenue performs this task. Charities are exempt from taxes on most types of income and capital gains, provided that the charity uses the income or gains for charitable purposes. They also are exempt from the value-added tax.

The Government provides funding for a large number of so-called "faith schools." As of May 2006, there were 6,874 state-funded schools with a religious character in England. There were 4,659 Anglican, 2,053 Roman Catholic, 1 Greek Orthodox, and 1 Seventh-day Adventist school. Other Christian denominations accounted for 115 of the schools. There were 36 Jewish, 7 Muslim, and 2 Sikh schools. In January 2005, Chief Inspector of Schools for England David Bell called on faith schools to be "intolerant of intolerance." In February 2005, then-Schools Minister for England Stephen Twigg published a list of best practices of how faith schools can implement inclusiveness and collaboration.

In Scotland, most faith-based government-funded schools were Roman Catholic, although there was also a Jewish school. The Scottish Executive undertook significant steps to address religious intolerance and bigotry. During 2006, the Executive was providing approximately $187,000 (100,000 pounds sterling) to support anti-sectarian projects in schools; $18,700 (10,000 pounds sterling) to support an anti-sectarian campaign run by the National Union of Students; and $25,245 (13,500 pounds sterling) to support anti-sectarian resources in youth work. It also added an anti-sectarian award for the Scottish Education Awards. The Executive was also undertaking measures in Scotland's sporting associations to tackle sectarianism.

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 three years before government funding begins. Demand for places in integrated schools outweighed the limited number of places available.

The law requires religious education in publicly maintained schools throughout the United Kingdom for ages three to nineteen. According to the Education Reform Act of 1988, it forms part of the core curriculum for students in England and Wales. In Scotland, religious education of some sort is mandated by the Education Act of 1980. Throughout the United Kingdom, the shape and content of religious instruction is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed syllabi are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity while taking into account the teachings and practices of other principal religions in the country. Syllabi must be nondenominational and

refrain from attempting to convert pupils. Schools with a religious designation follow a syllabus as drawn up by the school governors according to the trust deed of the school.

In addition, schools in England and Wales must provide a daily act of collective worship. In practice, this action mainly is Christian in character, reflecting Christianity's importance in the religious life of the country. This requirement may be waived if a school's administration deems it inappropriate for some or all of the students. All parents have the right to withdraw a child from religious education, but the schools must approve this request. Under some circumstances, non-Christian worship may instead be allowed. Teachers' organizations have criticized school prayer and called for a government review of the practice.

Where student bodies are characterized by a substantial percentage of religious minorities, schools may observe the religious festivals of other faiths. Schools also endeavor to accommodate religious requirements, such as providing halal meat for Muslim children.

In Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment Act bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. A broad network of laws, regulations, and oversight bodies work to ensure that there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious faiths. All public sector employers and all private firms with more than ten employees must report annually to the Equality Commission on the religious composition of their workforces, and must review their employment practices every three 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 five years.

In 2003, Parliament approved the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations, which adopted a European Commission Directive against religious discrimination. The regulations prohibit employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a "genuine occupational requirement" of a religious nature. The Government attempts to raise awareness of protections under the new regulations through help lines and good-practice advice. The regulations do not apply in Northern Ireland.

The Government makes an active effort to ensure that public servants are not discriminated against on the basis of religion, and strives to accommodate religious practices by government employees whenever possible. For example, the Prison Service permits Muslim employees to take time off during their shifts to pray. It also provides prisoners with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim chaplains. The Advisory Group on Religion in Prisons monitors policy and practice on issues relating to religious provision. The military generally provides soldiers who are adherents of minority religions with chaplains of their faith.

Following a May 5, 2006, Cabinet reshuffle, the Race, Cohesion and Faiths Directorate was formed in the newly-created Department for Communities and Local Government. The Directorate is responsible for tackling racism, extremism, and hate, and for promoting interfaith activity in England and Wales. It engages with faith communities to ensure government policies and services are delivered equally and appropriately. In March 2004, the Home Office published a report, "Working Together: Cooperation between Government and Faith Communities," in partnership with senior faith community representatives. The report recommended measures to ensure that government consultations include relevant input from faith communities when forming policy, to assess the extent to which faith communities benefit from government funding programs, to address funding deficiencies, and to involve the different faith communities in national services and celebrations in a way that reflects the diversity of the country.

As a result of the July 7, 2005, bombings, the Home Office also 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 that effort was the "theological roadshow," a series of seminars given by prominent Muslims advocating moderate, nonviolent interpretations of Islam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In March 2006, the Law Lords, the court of last resort, ruled in favor of a high school in Luton 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.

The school, which was 79 percent Muslim and had a Muslim headmaster, created the policy after consultation with local Muslim organizations. The school's policy allowed girls to wear a skirt, pants, or a shalwar kameez, which comprises a loose tunic and pants, and to cover their heads with headscarves. After her expulsion, Begum filed suit in the High Court, which ruled in the school's favor. In 2005, the Court of Appeal overturned this decision. Lord Bingham, announcing the Law Lords' decision, stated the school "had taken immense pains to devise a uniform policy which respected Muslim beliefs but did so in an inclusive, unthreatening and uncompetitive way." He also noted that the rules were acceptable to mainstream Muslim opinion. Begum was unsure at the end of the period covered by this report if she would appeal the decision in the European Court of Human Rights.

A secondary school in Horsham banned a group of teenage Christians from wearing "purity rings." The rings were inscribed with a biblical verse and worn as a symbol of their belief in chastity until marriage. Several students were punished with detentions and taught in isolation from other students for wearing the rings. The school maintained that wearing the rings violated the school's uniform policy, which prohibits all jewelry except for a small pair of ear studs. According to the father of Lydia Playfoot, one of the students, and press reporting, the school claimed that the no-jewelry policy was in effect because of health and safety concerns. The school told Mr. Playfoot that the rings could be injurious to a third party. The school refused to accept student and parent arguments that the rings were a form of religious expression and instead determined the rings to be merely decorative. Muslim and Sikh students, however, were allowed to wear headscarves or kara bracelets as a means of religious expression. Parents of the Christian students complained the policy was discriminatory and the punishment of teaching in isolation had a detrimental effect on students' education. At the end of the period covered by this report, some of the parents and students were considering legal action.

Under the 1990 Broadcasting Act and the 2003 Communications Act, religious bodies can hold local and national digital radio and digital terrestrial television licenses. Because of the limited broadcast spectrum, religious groups continued to be prohibited 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 to the court against the commission's decision. Scientology ministers are not considered ministers of religion for the purpose of the country's immigration regulations. Scientologist chapels do not qualify as places of worship under the law. The Prison Service does not recognize Scientology as a religion for the purpose of facilitating prison visits by ministers, although prisoners who are adherents of Scientology are free to register their adherence and to manifest their beliefs consistent with good order and discipline in prisons. To meet the needs of individual prisoners, the Prison Service allows any prisoner registered as a Scientologist to have access to a representative of the Church of Scientology if he wishes to receive its ministry.

The Reverend Sun Myung Moon, leader of the Unification Church, was excluded from the country from 2003 through 2005 following a decision by the Home Secretary. In January 2006, the Home Office removed the exclusion and allowed Reverend Moon to apply for a visa to enter the country during the period covered by this report. Allowed to use another type of visa, Reverend Moon entered the country in November 2005 and spent two days in London addressing followers.

In August 2004, new immigration regulations came into force, requiring visa applicants who wish to enter the country as ministers of religion to obtain level four competence in spoken English (on a scale of one to nine) 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 one year in the last five years as a minister. Ministers of religion applying for visas must also have one year of full-time experience or two years of part-time training following their ordination for faiths where ordination is the sole means of entering the ministry. A missionary seeking an entry visa must have been trained as a missionary or have worked as a missionary previously.

Other than some Anglican bishops' inclusion in the House of Lords, membership in a given religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents. The Anglican Archbishops of Canterbury and York; the Bishops of Durham, London, and Winchester; and twenty-one other bishops, in order of se-

niority, receive automatic membership in the House of Lords, whereas prominent clergy from other denominations or religions are not afforded this privilege.

While not usually enforced and essentially a legal anachronism, blasphemy against Anglican doctrine remains technically illegal in England and Wales. In early 2005, several religious organizations, in association with the Commission for Racial Equality, attempted to abolish the law or broaden its protection to include all faiths. According to the Government, there was no intention to revise or eliminate the law.

In relation to their percentage of the Northern Ireland population (44 percent), Catholics were underrepresented in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Ongoing government-mandated measures to increase Catholic representation in the PSNI have raised the proportion of Catholics in the police to 20 percent, compared to 8 percent in 1999.

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

During the calendar year of 2005, the Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 455 anti-Semitic incidents in the United Kingdom. CST recorded 82 assaults, 25 threats, 273 instances of abusive behavior, 27 cases of the distribution of anti-Semitic literature, and 48 instances of desecration and damage to property. The number of anti-Semitic incidents slightly decreased from 2004, but CST reported that the annual totals of anti-Semitic incidents have tended to rise since 1997. According to the Global Forum against Anti-Semitism's report for 2005, the United Kingdom continued to have the highest number of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe. The report stated that activities by "radical left wing organizations for a boycott of Israel including the academia and the church" created an atmosphere which laid the groundwork for anti-Semitic acts.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in British society contributed to religious freedom. In Northern Ireland, where centuries-old sectarian divisions persisted between the Protestant and Catholic communities, political and cultural differences contributed to problems between nationalists and unionists.

The police in Northern Ireland reported 222 attacks against both Catholic and Protestant churches, schools, and meeting halls in 2005. Such sectarian violence often coincided with tensions during the spring and summer marching season. The 2005 marching season saw violent rioting related to two parades in July and August, respectively. Negotiations involving parade organizers, leaders in nationalist and loyalist areas, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government and police officials helped ensure public order relating to other parades.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government was preparing a report on the abuse of African children branded as witches. Since the discovery of an unidentified Nigerian boy's torso in the Thames River in 2001, there has been widespread public speculation that children, mostly from Africa, have been abused in exorcism rituals by some African-based churches. In June 2005, an eight-year-old child, brought to the country from Angola, was beaten, cut, and had chili rubbed in her eyes because her aunt and two others believed she was a witch. The aunt and the two others were arrested on child abuse charges. There were similar reports of child abuse resulting from healing rituals, and the Government actively pursued and prosecuted child abuse in such cases.

On February 7, 2006, Abu Hamza al-Masri was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on eleven charges, including soliciting or encouraging the killing of Jews, inciting racial hatred, and possessing a document that contained information "of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism."

The Muslim community complained of intermittent incidents of discrimination, although no formal statistics were available. In January 2005, an employment equality tribunal ruled in favor of a Muslim man who requested time off from his employer to make a pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca. The man received no response, but was told by the manager that in the absence of a reply his leave was granted. The man was fired upon his return. The tribunal ruled that by not trying to accommodate the employee's religious requirement to go on Hajj or justifying a refusal to authorize his leave, the company was placing Muslim employees at a particular disadvantage and discriminating on the grounds of religion.

The Islamic community continued to criticize the police's use of "stop and search" powers under anti-terrorism laws. On May 18, 2006, the Islamic Human Rights Commission published a survey of Muslims in the country. Respondents generally perceived British anti-terrorism laws as being unfair towards Muslims, and society as lacking respect for Muslims. The report also indicated, however, that the majority of respondents supported British law.

On February 3, 2006, the leader of the British National Party (BNP) and a party activist were acquitted 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 broadcast of a BBC documentary entitled "Secret Agent." During the broadcast, the BNP leader was covertly recorded calling Islam a "vicious, wicked faith." At the end of the period covered by this report, their trials were pending.

There was a noticeable increase in the number of anti-Muslim incidents following the July 7, 2005, bombings of London's transport system. The bombings, carried out by Muslims, created a backlash against Muslims in the form of verbal and physical assaults, vandalism, arson, anti-Muslim literature, and Internet postings. 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 British Muslims were peaceful and law-abiding citizens.

The country had both active interfaith and ecumenical movements. 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 main ecumenical body was the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, which served as the main forum for interchurch cooperation and collaboration. Interchurch cooperation was not limited to dealings among denominations at the national level. 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 officers were in regular contact with the Board of Jewish Deputies, the Chief Rabbi's Office, the Community Security Trust, the Muslim College, Islamic Relief, and the Muslim Council of Britain. Embassy officials were highly engaged in "outreach" presentations to the British public, with a particular focus on Muslim communities. In the course of presentations, embassy officers discussed with the public the important role that religious diversity plays in the United States; the need for religious tolerance, especially towards immigrants from the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America; the fact that the United States is not involved in a war against Muslims; and the freedom of Muslims to practice their faith in the United States.

The consulate general in Edinburgh met regularly with Islamic studies graduate students and maintained close ties with lay and religious leaders from the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Roman Catholic Church, the Jewish Communities of Scotland, and various mosques.

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. 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. Religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited.

The status of respect for religious freedom declined during the reporting period. The Government increased requirements for the registration of religious organizations; increased punishments for foreigners who proselytize Muslims; and made regulations on the importation of non-Islamic religious texts more stringent. On March 20, 2006, Parliament adopted into law Ordinance 06–03 dealing with the conditions and regulations of religions other than Islam; the law was scheduled to be implemented beginning in September 2006. The ordinance confines non-Muslim worship to specific buildings approved by the state, imposes penalties for proselytizing, and treats these as criminal rather than civil offenses. President Bouteflika requested both the High Islamic Council and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to assist in refining the details of the ordinance; however, the law was passed without prior consultation with affected Christian religious groups and without any meaningful debate in Parliament. Out of a total of 533 parliamentarians in both chambers, only one senator voted against the measure.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, differences within the country's Muslim majority about the interpretation and practice of Islam caused some discord. Islamist terrorists continued to justify their killing of security force members and civilians by referring to interpretations of religious texts. The level of violence perpetrated by terrorists increased slightly during the reporting period due to terrorist reaction to the Government's Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation which was introduced as a measure to bring closure to the terrorist violence that killed nearly one hundred thousand citizens during the 1990s.

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 thirty-three million. More than 99 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. There was a small community of Ibadi Muslims in Ghardaia. Official data on the number of non-Muslim residents is not available; however, practitioners reported it to be below five thousand. The vast majority of Christians and Jews fled the country following independence from France in 1962. Many of those who remained left in the 1990s due to violent acts of terrorism committed by Islamic extremists. As a result, the number of Christians and Jews in the country was significantly lower than the estimated total before 1992. According to Christian community leaders, Methodists and members of other Protestant denominations accounted for the largest numbers of non-Muslims, followed by Roman Catholics and Seventh-day Adventists. It was estimated that there were three thousand members of evangelical churches (mostly in the Kabylie region) and approximately three hundred Catholics. A significant proportion of the country's Christian residents were students and illegal immigrants

from sub-Saharan Africa en route to Europe; their numbers were difficult to estimate accurately.

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 has 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, has reportedly increased in the region. Reporting suggests that citizens themselves, not foreigners, make up the majority of those actively proselytizing in Kabylie.

Only one missionary group operated in the country on a full-time basis. Other evangelical groups traveled to and from the country, but they 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 was closed. A number of Jews of local origin living abroad have visited the country in the past two years. A group visited Oran in 2004, and their visit was well received by local authorities. In May 2005 another group of 130 visited Tlemcen for the first time in more than forty years and met with former Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella.

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. 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.

During the reporting period, 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. On March 20, 2006, Parliament approved a controversial new law, Ordinance 06–03, which regulates non-Muslim worship and was scheduled to be implemented beginning in September 2006. The first four articles of the ordinance reiterate that the state religion is Islam and guarantee the freedom to exercise religious worship in the framework of the Constitution, the laws and regulations in force, public order, good moral standards, and the fundamental rights and liberties "of third parties." It also guarantees tolerance and respect "between various religions" and forbids the use of religious affiliation as a basis for discrimination against any individual or group. The ordinance confines non-Muslim worship to church buildings approved by the state, imposes penalties for proselytizing, and treats these as criminal rather than civil offenses. This law was passed without prior consultation with affected religious groups and, as a presidential decree, was subject to no debate or meaningful vote in Parliament.

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

The new law, Ordinance 06–03, which comprises three main sections and seventeen articles, restricts the exercise of religions other than Islam. Nonetheless, it conditionally affirms the freedom to exercise religious worship and prohibits discrimination based on religious affiliation. The Government intends to implement the law beginning in September 2006.

Articles 5 through 9 stipulate that all structures intended for the exercise of religious worship must be registered by the state, and any modification of a structure to allow religious worship is subject to prior approval of the yet to be created National Commission for the Exercise of Religious Worship. Additionally, worship may only take place in structures exclusively intended and approved for that purpose. This gives the Government the power to regulate the locations of all non-Muslim

worship and monitor participation. Effectively, the Government can now shut down informal Christian religious services that take place in private homes or in secluded outdoor settings.

Article 10 stipulates that the punishment for proselytizing is one to three years in jail and a maximum fine of 500 thousand Algerian dinars (DA) ($6,900) for lay individuals and three to five years of jail time and maximum 1 million DA ($13,800) if the person is a religious leader. Article 11 lays out a maximum of five years in jail and a 500 thousand DA 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. Contrary to previous practice, foreigners found guilty of the above offenses will serve their punishment and then be deported.

The new law caused concern in many Western capitals. The European Union chiefs of mission in the country met to discuss it in May 2006 and announced their intention to present a special report to the European Union with their analysis and outline of suggested actions. One particular area of concern is that Ordinance 06–03 contains vague wording that renders it susceptible to arbitrary interpretations and applications.

Local Christian leaders expressed concern over the new law, especially over not being consulted or warned prior to public release of the decree. They also collectively worried about its future impact on their religious activities. Although enforcement of the law was delayed until September 2006, Christian leaders have already seen a slight increase in monitoring of their religious work. In April 2006 a public library, sponsored by a Christian group, noted Government officials reviewing their inventory of books for "inappropriate" religious content. Local newspapers have displayed a new tendency to include pictures of the Notre Dame d'Afrique Basilica or Monsignor Tessier, the leader of the Catholic community in Algiers, with articles discussing evangelization. Often these articles report on conversions to Christianity in the Kabylie region, although they lack any connection to Notre Dame d'Afrique or Monsignor Tessier.

Ordinance 06–03 marks a step backward for religious freedom; however, it will take some time to determine the actual impact of the law.

In April 2006 President Bouteflika, in his remarks during a visit to the province of Constantine, stated that democracy does not mean citizens should "not react to the Christianization of our children."

On March 20, 2005 border authorities allegedly refused entrance to an American citizen, apparently on grounds of his religious convictions. Two citizens who met him at the airport were also allegedly placed in detention. The U.S. Embassy was not able to verify their release. The American citizen in question was originally expelled in 1970 on charges of evangelism and previously resided in the country for ten years. The Government did not respond to the U.S. Embassy's inquiries about the alleged incident.

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. In February 2005 the ministry created an Educational Commission under its auspices. The commission is composed of twenty-eight members who are in charge of developing an educational system for the teaching of the Qur'an. The commission is responsible for setting the 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 and pre-screen and approve sermons before they are delivered publicly during Friday prayers. In practice the Government generally reviews sermons after the fact. 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, bars the use of mosques as public meeting places outside of regular prayer hours, and convokes imams to the Ministry of Religious Affairs for "disciplinary action." In September 2005 eight imams in the wilaya (state) of Annaba received administrative sanctions from the Ministry of Religious Affairs due to the imams' refusal to conduct a "prayer of the absent" in commemoration of the country's two diplomats who were kidnapped and later killed in Baghdad.

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 activities. The Protestant, Catholic, 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 church. Only a few small churches exist; non-Muslims usually congregate in private homes for religious services.

Conversions from Islam to other religions are rare. Islamic law (Shari'a), as interpreted in the country, does not recognize conversion from Islam to any other religion; however, conversion is not illegal under civil law. Due to safety concerns and potential legal and social problems, Muslim converts practice their new faith clandestinely. 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 five to six months are incurred before obtaining such approval, and there have been further delays once these books reached 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 concerns that Government delays on 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. In May 2005 an American citizen and his wife were deported for reportedly importing Bibles into the country and proselytizing Muslims. 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, the Government did not extend recognition to these institutions during the reporting year. Consequently, private school students had to register as independent students within the public school system to take national baccalaureate examinations. In May 2005 the Ministry of National Education required private schools to submit their educational programs for approval. The Government has given official authorization to only 22 of 200 private schools so far. This measure was widely directed toward 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 law and treats women as minors under the legal guardianship of a husband or male relative. Under the code, Muslim women are prevented from marrying non-Muslims, although this regulation 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 non-monotheistic 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 another male relative—is to conclude the marriage on the woman's behalf, while a wali acts as a protector who is present while the woman concludes the marriage herself.

The Family Code also affirms the Islamic practice of allowing a man to marry up to four wives; however, he must obtain the consent of the current spouse, the intended new spouse, and a judge. Furthermore, a woman has the right to a no-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 also may suffer in inheritance claims when a Muslim family member also lays claim to the same inheritance. Women may take out business loans and are the sole custodians of their dowries; however, in practice, women do not always have exclusive control over assets they bring to a marriage or income they have earned. Females under eighteen 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 papers with an Islamic outlook. More frequent were articles criticizing policies of the Israeli Government and leadership. Articles referring to Israel or Israelis in several non-government papers, including El Khabar, were accompanied by unrelated photos and cartoons of Orthodox Jews with beards and sidelocks, a form of anti-Semitic stereotyping. 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 later offshoot, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, against the Government. While estimates vary, approximately 100 thousand to 150 thousand civilians, terrorists, and security forces have been killed during the past fourteen 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, including seven Trappist monks killed by Islamist terrorists in 1996. Extremists continued attacks against both the Government and moderate Muslim and secular civilians, with the level of violence slightly increasing during the reporting period. As a rule, the majority of the country's terrorist groups do not differentiate between religious and political killings.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, differences that remain within the country's Muslim majority about the interpretation and practice of Islam caused some discord. A very small number of citizens, such as Ibadi Muslims living in the desert town of Ghardaia, practice non-mainstream forms of Islam or practice other religions, but there is minimal societal discrimination against them.

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.

The majority of cases of harassment and security threats against non-Muslims come from radical Islamists who are determined to rid the country of those who do not share their extremist interpretation of Islam. However, a majority of the population subscribes to Islamic precepts of tolerance in religious beliefs. Moderate Muslim religious and political leaders have publicly criticized acts of violence committed in the name of Islam. In 2005 a Protestant minister who was a highly respected longtime resident was stabbed outside his house in Algiers in what is widely believed to have been a religiously motivated attack. The High Islamic Council was quick to condemn the attack. On April 8, 2005, in a show of religious harmony, a

large number of both Christians and Muslims attended a memorial Catholic Mass at Notre Dame d'Afrique Basilica honoring Pope John Paul II.

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.

Embassy officials met with the Ministry for Religious Affairs, including the ambassador's April 2006 meeting with the minister of religious affairs during which he raised concerns over the new legislation restricting non-Muslim worship. The deputy chief of mission met with the head of the Council of the Ulema, an independent body of Islamic religious scholars. Embassy officials and a U.S. senator established a dialogue on religious freedom with the High Islamic Council.

The Embassy underscored the need for religious tolerance in several speeches given by the ambassador and by funding two cultural restoration projects with religious significance for both Christians and Muslims. Embassy officials also promoted religious freedom in speeches to university students by describing the high level of tolerance that all faiths, including Islam, enjoy in the United States. The Embassy maintained contact with three Islamic political parties (Movement for Peaceful Society, El-Islah, and former members of the defunct group Ennahda) and met with the Wafa Party, which remains unrecognized by the Government.

The Embassy maintained frequent contact with the National Consultative Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, a quasi-governmental human rights organization established by the Government in 2001 in response to international and domestic pressure to improve its human rights record. Individuals and groups who believe they are not being treated fairly by the Ministry of Religious Affairs may voice their concerns to this commission.

BAHRAIN

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion and also provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on this freedom.

There was a slight change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. The Government continued to subject both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to some governmental control and monitoring, 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, Shi'a Muslims, who constitute the majority of the population, often resented minority Sunni Muslim rule.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 231 square miles, and its population is approximately 725,000. The citizen population is 98 percent Muslim; Jews and Christians constitute the remaining 2 percent. Muslim citizens belong to the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam, with Shi'a constituting an estimated 70 percent of the indigenous population.

Foreigners, mostly from South Asia and other Arab countries, constitute an estimated 38 percent of the total population. Approximately half of resident foreigners are non-Muslim, including Christians, Hindus, Bahá'ís, Buddhists, and Sikhs.

The American Mission Hospital, which is affiliated with the National Evangelical Church, has operated in the country for more than a century. The church adjacent to the hospital held weekly multilingual services and served as a meeting place for several denominations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution states that Islam is the official religion and also provides for freedom of religion; however, there were some limits on this right. The Government continues to register new religious non-governmental organizations, including some with the legal authority to conduct political activities. In 2002, the king issued a

new Constitution and held Municipal Council and National Assembly elections. In the 2002 Municipal Council elections, candidates associated with religious political groups won forty of the fifty contested seats. In the 2002 legislative election, candidates associated with religious groups won more than half of the Council of Representatives' forty seats. In both elections, candidates from religious political groups conducted their campaigns without any interference from the Government.

There was one Jewish member and one Christian member of the forty-member upper house of Parliament, the Shura Council. All members of the Shura Council were appointed by the king.

The Government continued to subject both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims to some governmental control and monitoring, and there was some government discrimination against Shi'a Muslims in certain fields. Members of other religious groups who practiced their faith privately did so without interference from the Government and were permitted to maintain their own places of worship and display the symbols of their religion.

Every religious group must obtain a license from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs to operate. Depending on circumstances, a religious group may need approval from the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Education. Christian congregations, which were registered with the Ministry of Social Development, operated freely and allowed other Christian congregations to use their facilities. One synagogue, four Sikh temples, and several official and unofficial Hindu temples are located in Manama, the capital, and its suburbs. In 2003, the Orthodox community celebrated the consecration of the new and expanded St. Mary's Church, which was built on land donated by other Christian groups.

In the past, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs had repeatedly denied a Baha'i community's request for a license to operate. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs stated that the Baha'i faith is an offshoot of Islam. According to its official interpretation of Islam, the Government regards the core beliefs of Baha'is to be blasphemous and consequently illegal, and therefore the ministry refuses to recognize the religion, but it allows the community to gather and worship freely. The Baha'i community has not sought official recognition in many years.

Unregistered Christian congregations existed, and there was no attempt by the Government to force them to register. Holding a religious meeting without a permit is illegal; however, there were no reports of religious groups being denied a permit to gather.

The High Council for Islamic Affairs is charged with the review and approval of all clerical appointments within both the Sunni and Shi'a communities and maintains program oversight for all citizens studying religion abroad.

Islamic studies were a part of each year's curriculum in government schools and mandatory for all public school students. The decades-old curriculum is based on the Maliki school of Sunni theology. The Shi'a community has lobbied for inclusion of the Ja'afari (Shi'a) traditions in the curriculum for years, but this proposal has been rejected. In 2002 a public school for boys called the Ja'afari Institute, which covers the entire public school curriculum, opened offering religion classes in Ja'afari traditions for the first time. The school does not teach Sunni Maliki traditions. The school began in 2002 with students in the first grade only and has expanded its enrollment each year because its first-year contingent of students has proceeded to the next grade. The Ministry of Education has agreed in principle to the opening of a Ja'afari Institute for girls, but at the end of the period covered by this report, plans had not been finalized about the school's opening.

Shi'a were 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 was only one Islamic studies head teacher who was 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 were 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. This committee continues to develop the next year's curriculum as the oldest group of students at the Ja'afari Institute ages and proceeds to the next academic year.

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 Sunni Shari'a judges.

The country observes the Muslim feasts of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Islamic New Year as national holidays. The Shi'a religious celebration of Ashura is a two-day national holiday. The Shi'a stage large public processions and other related activities during the holiday, and the Government does not restrict the religious elements of these events. The Ministry of Information provides media coverage of Ashura events.

Leaders representing many religious groups visited the country and met with government and civic leaders. These included the bishops of the Ethiopian and Syrian Orthodox churches and the general secretary of the Reformed Church in America.

Members of the Awali Community Church visited Christian prison inmates during the reporting period to provide items of clothing and Christian literature. In March 2005, members of the Sacred Heart Church were granted permission to visit Christian prison inmates and distribute religious materials to them.

In April 2005, the Islamic Awareness Center opened with the goal of promoting understanding of Islam and building bridges with other religious groups. The Islamic Enlightenment Society organized a conference in May 2005 aimed at diffusing tension between Muslim sects.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government funds, monitors, and closely controls all official religious institutions. These include Shi'a and Sunni mosques, Shi'a ma'tams (religious community centers), Shi'a and Sunni waqfs (charitable foundations), and the religious courts, which represent both the Ja'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.

Towns that were developed and expanded in the past ten years, such as Hamad Town and Isa Town, had mixed Sunni and Shi'a populations. In these new areas, there were a greater number of Sunni than Shi'a mosques. In June 2004, King Hamad approved the construction of a large Shi'a mosque on a site in Hamad Town that had been the subject of a dispute between the two branches of Islam.

The Government prohibits anti-Islamic writings. Bibles and other Christian publications are displayed and sold openly in local bookstores that also sold Islamic and other religious literature. Religious tracts of all branches of Islam, cassettes of sermons delivered by Muslim preachers from other countries, and publications of other religions were readily available. However, in the past few years the Ministry of Information 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 anti-government or anti-Islamic. The software used was unreliable and often inhibits access to uncontroversial sites as well.

Following Ashura in February 2006, the Islamic Enlightenment Society displayed banners and billboards in several places in the country after receiving permission from the Ministry of Municipalities and Agriculture. The banners and billboards contained a 2003 sermon quote from Shi'a cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim implying that the country is divided into two camps, that of Imam Hussain and that of the Umayyad ruler Yazid, whose army killed Hussain and his followers in the seventh century. Senior Government officials, Sunni members of parliament, and columnists were quick to condemn this message as being sectarian and a misuse of freedom of expression. Representatives of the Islamic Enlightenment Society called a press conference to explain the message of the quote was for all Muslims to choose between right (Hussain) and wrong (Yazid), and that there was no sectarian meaning intended. The ministry subsequently asked the society to remove all banners, and the society complied with the request.

In 2005, the Shi'a Islamic bloc in the Council of Representatives (COR) proposed that the country's public schools teach the four main Sunni schools of thought and the Shi'a Ja'afari school of thought. The proposal was rejected by the Services Committee and by the COR. This proposal was raised again in February 2006, but was similarly rejected.

In March 2006, a University of Bahrain student was found to have distributed booklets and cassettes containing content that was insulting to Shi'ism and promoting sectarianism. University officials confiscated the materials and reportedly were to discuss the consequences of the student's actions. The results of these discussions were not made public.

In March 2005, residents of Muharraq submitted a petition to the Ministry of Information requesting that the government-run TV station make live broadcasts of Friday sermons from Shi'a mosques, and not just from Sunni mosques. According

to the petitioners, a similar request sent to the ministry in 2004 did not receive a response, and there was no response to the 2005 request.

In 2004, the Ministry of Information banned Mel Gibson's film "The Passion of the Christ"; according to the ministry, this decision was based on Islamic Shari'a prohibitions regarding the depiction of the Prophet Isa (Jesus).

There are no restrictions on the number of citizens permitted to make pilgrimages to Shi'a shrines and holy sites in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The Government monitors travel to Iran and scrutinizes carefully those who choose to pursue religious study there.

The Government does not designate religion or sect on national identity documents. Upon the birth of a child, parents applying for a birth certificate were asked to provide the child's religion (not sect), but the government-issued birth certificate did not include this information.

Although there were notable exceptions, the Sunni Muslim minority enjoys a favored status. Sunnis often received preference for employment in sensitive government positions and in the managerial ranks of the civil service. Shi'a citizens did not hold significant posts in the defense and internal security forces, although they were allowed to be employed in the enlisted ranks. In September 2004, the Interior Ministry established a community police program to place 500 Shi'a men and women on the streets in Shi'a neighborhoods.

During the reporting period, the public Ja'afari Institute in Juffair, which opened in 2002, served students in grades one through four. The school is the first in which the Islamic Studies curriculum is designed to provide primary and secondary students with a foundation in the Ja'afari Shi'a school of Islam. The school teaches all subjects in the public school curriculum, but does not teach the Maliki school of Sunni Islam. The prime minister officiated at the official opening in June 2005.

Since 1950, a registered Christian church with more than 1,000 members has sought a parcel of land from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs on which to build its own church and hold religious services. The ministry has not responded to its formal applications. The National Evangelical Church allowed this church to use its facilities for services. However, the facility could only accommodate half of the church's congregation at any one time.

Since 1985, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs has verbally denied Shi'a applications and petitions to establish a mosque and ma'tam in Riffa to serve that community's Shi'a population. Riffa is home to the Sunni ruling family. In 2004, the Ministry of the Royal Court formally denied the application, citing that land in Riffa cannot be allocated for commercial enterprises since it is reserved for the ruling family.

In 2003, the Ministry of Interior lifted its ban on policewomen wearing headscarves (hijab). Also in 2003, by royal decree, the king allowed women to drive while fully veiled (niqab). In July 2004, the Ministry of Defense lifted its ban on growing beards, a common practice among many Muslims. All military personnel who had been released for growing beards were reinstated. For workers in government offices there are no prohibitions against men growing long beards or women being fully veiled, however, in reality there are few women government workers who wore a full veil (niqab).

Although the 2002 Constitution provides for women's political rights, Shari'a governs the personal legal rights of women. Specific rights vary according to Shi'a or Sunni interpretations of Islamic law, as determined by the individual's faith, or by the courts in which various contracts, including marriage, have been made. While both Shi'a and Sunni women have the right to initiate a divorce, religious courts may refuse the request. 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 non-citizen woman automatically loses custody of her children if she divorces their citizen father.

The Supreme Council for Women launched a public awareness campaign in the fall of 2005 highlighting the need for a family law or personal status law. This was followed by public debate and rallies both in favor and against such a law. Civil so-

ciety groups also held seminars and workshops throughout the fall and winter advocating such legislation. The Government introduced draft legislation in March 2006 containing separate sections for Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, one section according to the Shi'a Ja'afari tradition, and the other section according to the Sunni Maliki tradition. There was widespread resistance to the legislation from the Shi'a community in the absence of Constitutional guarantees that the legislation would not be changed in the future without the input and approval of Shi'a clerics. Discussions were ongoing throughout the reporting period.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Although there are exceptions, 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. To remedy social inequalities, the Government has built numerous subsidized housing complexes, which are open to all citizens on the basis of financial need.

The law does not prohibit conversion from one religion to another. 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 2004, unknown assailants vandalized the Zainab mosque. The assailants destroyed all water faucets, fans, electrical switches, lamps, microphones, clocks, and audiotapes. The director of the Ja'afari Awqaf sought police assistance to investigate the crime. Those responsible for the damage were not found.

In 2003, unknown assailants vandalized the Sa'sa'a Mosque. The director of the Government-funded agency responsible for managing Government-held Shi'a properties (Ja'afari Awqaf) did not seek police assistance or an investigation.

There were no acts of physical violence or harassment of Jews or vandalism of Jewish community institutions, such as schools, cemeteries, or the synagogue. The Government has not enacted any laws protecting the right of Jews to religious freedom; however, it has not interfered with their freedom to practice. The Government makes no effort specifically to promote antibias and tolerance education. 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.

SECTION IV. U.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 and discuss matters of religious freedom among other human rights-related topics.

With U.S. Government funding, Arab Civitas is helping the Ministry of Education develop a civic education program for public schools that includes lessons on human rights and tolerance. In 2003 and 2004, the Embassy worked with the Ministry of Education to create and implement a new English language curriculum that stresses respect for persons of different religious backgrounds.

In October 2005, Georgetown University Muslim chaplain Imam Yehya Hindi visited the country to discuss how Islam is practiced in America and its acceptance in daily life and to promote religious tolerance and understanding.

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.

There was no significant change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government opposed advances in the respect for religious freedom affecting Baha'is; there continued to be abuses and numerous restrictions, and some improvements. It appealed an April 4 decision by the Administrative Court which supported the right of Baha'i citizens to receive ID cards and birth certificates with religion noted on the documents.

In December the president decreed that permits for church repair and rebuilding, previously requiring his approval, could be granted by provincial governors. The purpose of this was to reduce delay. The central government continued to control the granting of permits for construction of new churches. Despite the 2005 decree, as well as a previous presidential decree in 1999 to facilitate approvals, many churches continued to encounter difficulty in obtaining permits.

Metwalli Ibrahim Metwalli Saleh, arrested by the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) in May 2003 apparently for his views on Islam, including support of the right to convert, was released on April 23 after receiving eight separate rulings from the Supreme State Security Emergency Court in his favor and an official statement from the state security prosecutor ordering his release. Saleh, age fifty-two, had been held in Al-Wadi al-Gadid Prison, near Assiut.

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, which numbered 500 to 2000 persons. In the past, the Government did not provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status. Over the past two years, approximately thirty-two converts from Christianity to Islam, who wished to return to Christianity, have received verdicts allowing them to recover their original Christian identities. This principle, however, has not been tested in courts in the cases of citizens originally Muslim who converted to Christianity. The Government also continued to prosecute a small number of citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs and practices alleged to "insult heavenly religions."

There continued to be religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society during the period covered by this report. In October 2005 and April 2006, Alexandria witnessed sectarian strife. In the October incident, a young Muslim man, enraged by reports that some Christians had staged a play critical of Islam, attacked several Christians outside a church. Subsequent riots left three Muslims dead and resulted in significant damage to Copt (Egyptian Christian) private properties and some damage to churches. In the April incident, a man attacked Copt worshippers with a knife outside three churches in separate locations, killing one elderly Christian and wounding more than a dozen. The suspect, who had a history of mental illness, was immediately apprehended by the security forces. Subsequent communal violence, and the response by the security forces, injured dozens of protestors from both sides. A parliamentary panel had not formally visited Alexandria and had not completed its investigation of this incident by the end of 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. The ambassador, senior administration officials, and members of congress continued to raise U.S. concerns about religious discrimination with senior government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 370,308 square miles, and its population, as of June 2006, was approximately 73.7 million, of whom almost 90 percent were estimated to be Sunni Muslims. Shi'a Muslims constituted less than 1 percent of the population. Estimates of the percentage of Christians in the population ranged from 8 percent to 15 percent, or between 6 to 11 million, the majority of whom belonged to the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Other Christian communities included the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic (Armenian, Chaldean, Greek, Melkite, Roman, and Syrian Catholic), Maronite, and Orthodox (Greek and Syrian) churches. An evangelical Protestant church, established in the middle of the nineteenth century, included sixteen Protestant denominations. There also were followers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was granted

legal status in the 1960s. There were small numbers of Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, but the Government does not recognize either group. The non-Muslim, non-Coptic Orthodox communities ranged in size from several thousand to hundreds of thousands. The number of Baha'is was estimated at between 500 and 2 thousand persons. The Jewish community numbered fewer than 200 persons.

Christians were dispersed throughout the country, although the percentage of Christians tended to be higher in Upper Egypt (the southern part of the country) and some sections of Cairo and Alexandria.

There were 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. The Government generally tolerated these groups if they did not proselytize. However, the Government over the past several years refused reentry into the country of individuals suspected of proselytizing. In September 2005 an American Christian missionary who had previously resided in the country reported that he had been refused entry. In November 2005 press reports indicated that the Government deported a Korean Christian missionary.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution, under Article 46, provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites; however, the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Islam is the official state religion, and Shari'a is the primary source of legislation; religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited. Members of the non-Muslim religious minorities generally worship without legal harassment and may maintain links with 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 "ridiculing of a heavenly religion." The Government last recognized a new religious group—First Bible Baptist Folk—in 1990.

During the year, Jehovah's Witnesses engaged the Government on their legal registration. Jehovah's Witnesses have been banned in the country since 1960, despite a presence dating to the 1930s and legal registration in Cairo in 1951 and Alexandria in 1956. The Government's opposition to Jehovah's Witnesses was based on opposition from the Coptic Orthodox Church, which has condemned the Jehovah's Witnesses as heretical, as well as Nasser-era concerns about links to Israel. A 1964 Arab League decree labeled the Jehovah's Witnesses as Zionists. Since 1960, Jehovah's Witnesses have reported varying degrees of harassment and surveillance by Government agents. In February and May 2006 representatives from the Jehovah's Witnesses New York headquarters, accompanied by European colleagues, visited the country for meetings with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Council for Human Rights, the Arab League, and others. The delegation reported that, as a result of its visit, they believed that harassment and hostile surveillance of the group had ceased, but progress on registration was not realized. Previously, in June 2005, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that one of their members was detained for five days and assaulted by State Security agents.

The Government continued to encourage interfaith dialogue. The religious establishment of Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Awqaf (Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs) engaged in interfaith discussions, both domestically and abroad. In 2004 the Government announced the formation of the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR), on which five of the twenty-five appointed members, as well as the president, are Copts. The 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. The council gave only superficial attention to the issue of religious freedom in its first annual report. In its second report, released in March, the council called for a solution for official recognition of

Baha'is; addressed the problem of Jehovah's Witnesses; and criticized religious textbooks in schools for failing to address human rights topics. The report also recommended that Parliament pass a law that would facilitate the construction of new places of worship for all religious groups. Finally, the report noted that the council had not received any response from the Ministry of Interior or several governorates to its nine inquiries related to numerous complaints of alleged violations of religious freedom that it had received.

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

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 74,500 free-standing mosques and 18,000 mosques located in private buildings. The Government annexes new mosques every year, but cannot keep pace with new mosque construction. A February 2004 decree from the minister of awqaf removed the authority to issue permits to build mosques from governors and also placed mosques in private homes under awqaf administrative control.

The contemporary interpretation of the 1856 Ottoman Hamayouni decree, partially still in force, requires non-Muslims to obtain a presidential decree to build new churches and synagogues. In addition, Ministry of Interior regulations, issued in 1934 under the Al-Ezabi decree, specify a set of ten 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 not be less than one hundred meters and that the approval of the neighboring Muslim community be obtained.

In an April 2005 broadcast on national television, President Hosni Mubarak stated that the problem of issuing permits to build churches had been addressed by the Government and that all citizens are treated equally. However, in practice, many churches face difficulty in obtaining permits from provincial officials. Although President Mubarak reportedly has approved all requests for permits presented to him, Interior Ministry delays—in some instances indefinitely—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.

In March 2004 the Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that the Constitution required Christian and Muslim endowments be treated under an equal standard and that Christian endowments, like Muslim endowments, could not be sued. However, this "equal treatment" ruling has not been extended to legal cases relative to the construction and repair of churches.

In November 2005 a presidential decree was issued to build a new church in al-Rehab City, a large, new development on the outskirts of Cairo with a population of approximately 80 thousand. Church officials applied for the decree in 2001; construction is scheduled to be completed in early 2007. The first mass was held at the construction site on June 2, 2005. Presidential decrees to build new churches were also issued for the newly constructed cities of Sheikh Zaied, Tenth of Ramadan, New Cairo, New Assuit, and New Minya during the year.

In March 2006 Pope Shenouda III, accompanied by the governor of Aswan and forty church officials, formally opened a new cathedral in the Upper Egypt governorate of Aswan. Six years in construction, the new cathedral cost $2.09 million (12 million Egyptian pounds) and holds 6 thousand worshippers.

According to statistics published by the Government's Official Gazette, sixty-three Presidential decrees were issued from June 30, 2005, through July 1, 2006, for church-related construction, compared with twelve permits reported during the previous period. Of the sixty-three decrees, twenty-one were issued for construction of new churches (fourteen Orthodox, two Protestant, two Catholic), community service buildings (two Orthodox), and one hospital (Catholic); twenty to grant official status to existing churches (eleven Orthodox, seven Protestant, two Catholic); twenty to rebuild or reconstruct existing churches (eight Orthodox, eight Protestant), a community service building (Orthodox) and monasteries (three Orthodox); and two for general maintenance or repairs of existing churches (both Protestant).

The approval process for church construction continued to be hindered by lengthy delays often measured in years. In at least three locales during the reporting period (Mankateen, Minya Governorate; Ezzbet Wasef, Giza Governorate; and Odayysat,

Luxor), objections by Muslim citizens to churches that were operating without official government approval led to sectarian clashes.

In early December 2005 President Mubarak issued Decree 291/2005, which delegated authority to the country's twenty-seven 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 thirty 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.)

Six months after the promulgation of Decree 291/2005, church and lay leaders have complained, privately and publicly, 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 which 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 to be issued.

At the unlicensed Evangelical Church in Maadi, police reportedly halted a reconstruction project in November 2004 and prevented church members from entering the church. For fifty years the church has been unable to obtain a licensing permit.

The Assiut bishopric has been waiting for local officials to issue a building permit for a new church in the governorate's Arbaeen District, despite a 1997 order from the president and approval from the Ministry of Interior to issue the decree. 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 eighteen 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 at Awlad Elias in Sadfa, near Assiut, stating that the Orthodox church was given license to effect several remodeling projects and restoration projects. In 2001, however, Sadfa police halted repairs, because authorities believed that the church would enlarge its size by extending the building into the churchyard. After negotiations with State Security, the church received permission to demolish a wall to extend its size. However, after the newspaper Watani published an article exposing this issue and the outcome, State Security officials halted construction a second time. As of the end of June 2005, construction had not resumed, and the church was still waiting for the MOI to permit resumption of repairs. The congregation was forced to build a tent in the small church courtyard to conduct prayers.

Despite governorate level approval in 2001 for restorations to the Mar Guirguis Church in Sahel Salim, Assiut, local authorities blocked work on the church on a variety of pretexts until a presidential decree in June 2005 paved the way for the complete rebuilding of the church.

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 congrega-

tion. 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. In May 2005 State Security 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. As a result of restrictions, some communities use private buildings and apartments for religious services or build without permits.

In April 2005 unknown arsonists burned down an unlicensed church hall in Baghour village, Menoufiya Governorate. Nine Coptic Christians received minor injuries. The local governor supported rebuilding the facility.

In January 2006 there were sectarian clashes in the settlement of Udayssat, near Luxor. On January 17 Christians conducted Epiphany services in a building that has intermittently served as an unlicensed church since 1971. On January 18 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. On January 20 assailants killed a forty-seven-year-old Christian farmer, 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 murder.

In late October 2005 SSIS in Alexandria arrested and detained without charge for several weeks a twenty-one-year-old Alexandria law student, Abdul Karim Nabil Soliman, apparently because his Internet Web log ("blog") carried strongly worded attacks against Islam, the Government, and the president. Soliman was released without charge.

The Government continued to try citizens for unorthodox religious beliefs. In March 2005 the Maadi misdemeanor court issued a verdict in a blasphemy case involving Ibrahim Ahmad Abu Shusha and eleven of his followers, who had been detained absent an arrest warrant since July 2004. The court sentenced Abu Shusha to a prison term of three years for claiming to be divine and ridiculing a heavenly religion, namely Islam. The court sentenced the eleven other defendants (including three women, two of whom are Abu Shusha's wives) to one year imprisonment and ordered the confiscation of the leaflets and writings that propagated the group's ideology. In its reasoning, the court stated that there was sufficient evidence that Abu Shusha embraced beliefs that are contrary to and derogatory of Islam, and that he tried to propagate those beliefs by attempting to show that he possessed divine powers. The court also asserted that freedom of belief does not comprise permission to deny the principles of heavenly religions. An appeals court reaffirmed the Abu Shusha sentences on July 16, 2005. At the end of the reporting period, Abu Shusha's lawyers were seeking to appeal his case to the Court of Cassation, the nation's highest court.

On July 6, 2005 the Administrative Judiciary Court in Alexandria annulled a decree issued by the minister of information that had banned the appearance of 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.

The Egyptian Parties Law 40 of 1977 states that political parties based on religion are illegal. Pursuant to this law, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is an illegal organization. Muslim Brothers speak openly and publicly about their views and have recently been identifying themselves publicly as members of the organization, although they remain subject to arbitrary treatment and pressure from the Government. During the period covered by this report, hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested and charged with membership in an illegal organization, planning to revive the activities of the banned group, possessing anti-government leaflets, obstructing the Constitution and the law of the country, and organizing demonstrations without obtaining prior security permission. Authorities prevented several other members from traveling abroad. Authorities arrested Essam El-Erian in May 2005 after he indicated that he was planning to run for president. El-Erian was released in October, but detained again in May. He and dozens of other MB members remained in detention at the end of the reporting period.

Eighty-eight independent candidates backed by the Muslim Brotherhood were elected to the People's Assembly in the 2005 parliamentary elections, held between November 9 and December 7, despite government-sponsored efforts to stop them. Government actions included limiting access to polling stations, detentions, and government-sponsored violence. There were also credible allegations of ballot tampering and fraud. Many of the MB-affiliated candidates ran openly under the slogan "Islam is the solution," and displayed the MB insignia on their campaign materials. Despite the relative freedom allowed to candidates during the initial stages of the elections, after striking gains by MB candidates in the first round, security forces restricted access to certain polling stations in hotly contested races and killed at least eleven citizens in related civil disturbances.

In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of authors facing trial or charges related to writings or statements considered heretical during the reporting period.

Various ministries are legally authorized to ban or confiscate books and other works of art upon obtaining a court order. The Council of Ministers may order the banning of works that it deems offensive to public morals, detrimental to religion, or likely to cause a breach of the peace. The Islamic Research Center (IRC) at Al-Azhar University has legal authority to censor and, as of June 2004, confiscate, all publications dealing with the Qur'an and the authoritative Islamic traditions (Hadith). In recent years, the IRC has passed judgment on the suitability of nonreligious books and artistic productions, and there were several new cases of confiscation during the period covered by this report. Al-Azhar has the legal right to recommend confiscation, but the actual act of confiscation requires a court order.

The law authorizes various ministries to ban or confiscate books and other works of art upon obtaining 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.

In October 2005 the Government enforced a ban, formally recommended by the IRC, of Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad, by Natana De Long-Bas, published by the American University in Cairo (AUC) Press. On October 8 the Government informed AUC that all one thousand copies, held at Port Said, would be impounded because the book contained "information not in accordance with the principles of Islam." On December 22 the Government advised AUC Press that it had reversed this decision and would allow importation of the book.

In June 2006 the Ministry of Culture's Department of Artistic Censorship banned the film The Da Vinci Code as well as the English and Arabic versions of the novel. Police also confiscated two thousand copies of a pirated DVD version of the film and arrested the owner of a local production company. Both the Arabic and English language versions of the novel had been sold in the country since 2003.

The local media, including state television and newspapers gives 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.

Pope Shenouda III has banned Coptic travel to Jerusalem since the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979. However, press reports indicated that an estimated 735 Egyptian Copts visited Israel in 2004 for pilgrimage, citing Israeli Interior Ministry statistics. There were no statistics available for subsequent periods.

The Government continued to deny civil documents, including ID cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to members of the Baha'i community. The Government appealed an April 4, 2006 decision by the Administrative Court which supported the right of Baha'i citizens to receive ID cards and birth certificates with religion noted on the documents. On June 19, the Administrative Court postponed the appeal hearing to September 16.

Law 263 of 1960, still in force, bans Baha'i institutions and community activities, and a 1961 presidential decree stripped Baha'is of legal recognition. During the Nasser era, the Government confiscated all Baha'i community properties, including Baha'i centers, libraries, and cemeteries. The 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 include mention of 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 sixteen face additional problems under Law 143/1994, which makes it mandatory for all citizens to obtain a new identification card featuring a new national identification number. Police, often on public buses, conduct random inspections of identity papers, and those found without their identity card are regularly detained until the document is provided to the police. Some Baha'is without identity cards frequently stay home to avoid police scrutiny and possible arrest.

In May 2004 the Government confiscated the identity cards of two Baha'is who were applying for passports. Officials told them that they were acting on instructions from the MOI to confiscate any identity cards belonging to Baha'is.

In 1997 a human rights activist filed a lawsuit seeking the removal of the religious affiliation category from government identification cards. The plaintiff challenged the constitutionality of a 1994 decree by the MOI governing the issuance of new identification cards. A hearing scheduled for February 25, 2005, never took place. The court informed the attorney for the plaintiff that the case documents had been withdrawn and forwarded to the president of the State's Council, a highly unusual procedure. In December the court dismissed the appeal on a technicality, arguing that the complainant failed to file the appeal within sixty days after the decree had been published in the Government's Official Gazette in 1995.

Lack of formal legal recognition also concerns the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), or Mormons, in Cairo. The LDS Church has maintained an organized congregation in the country for more than thirty 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 thirty years, a Copt was appointed one of the country's twenty-six governors, in Qena. As of June 30, there were six Christians (five appointed, one elected) in the 454-seat People's Assembly; six Christians (all appointed) in the 264-seat Shura Council; and two Christians in the 32-member cabinet. Christians, who represented between 8 and 15 percent of the population, held 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, payment of Muslim imams through public funds and barring Christians from study at Al-Azhar University (a publicly funded institution). 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 the study of the Qur'an. In fall 2005 Christian student Christine Zaher successfully completed the requirements for a master's degree in Arabic from the Suez Canal University in Port Said and secured a teaching position at the same university. Prior to her graduation, there had been no reports of Christian graduates in Arabic language since 2001; she was the first Copt appointed to a university level Arabic language teaching position in several decades.

In February 2006 Dr. Salem Salaam, chairman of the pediatrics department at Minya University, resigned to protest the university's decision not to hire a medical resident onto the faculty of the university, based on the resident's Christian faith.

On May 7 President Mubarak appointed seven new judges to the Supreme Constitutional Court, including Tamer Remon Iskandar, a Copt.

In January 2005 and January 2006 Jewish pilgrims again 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 mar-

riage between a Christian woman and a Muslim man, the courts apply Shari'a. The Government does not recognize the marriages of citizens adhering to faiths other than Christianity, Judaism, or Islam.

Under Shari'a, as practiced in the country, non-Muslim males must convert to Islam to marry Muslim women, but non-Muslim women need not convert to marry Muslim men. Muslim women are prohibited from marrying Christian men.

Inheritance laws for all citizens are based on the Government's interpretation of Shari'a. Muslim female heirs receive half the amount of a male heir's inheritance. 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 women members who marry Muslim men and requires that other Christians convert to Coptic Orthodoxy to marry a member of the church. Coptic males are prevented from marrying Muslim women by both civil and religious laws. A civil marriage abroad is an option should a Christian male and 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

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 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."

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 fifteen months in administrative detention without charge or trial. There were credible reports that members of the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) repeatedly tortured and mistreated Derini while he was in custody.

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 on April 23, 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 harassed converts from Islam to Christianity. In April 2005, the authorities detained Baha Al-Accad, a citizen who was born Muslim but who was reported to have converted to Christianity. Al-Accad remained in detention at Tora Prison, south of Cairo, at the end of the reporting period, apparently under investigation for "denigrating a heavenly religion." 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.

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 chil-

dren, may automatically become classified as Muslims in the eyes of the Government irrespective of the religion of the other spouse. This practice is in accordance with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, which dictates "no jurisdiction of a non-Muslim over a Muslim."

In April 2004 an administrative court issued a verdict allowing Mona Makram Gibran, who had converted to Islam and later converted back to Christianity, to recover her original (Christian) name and identity. Some legal observers 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." As of late June 2006, there were 148 other cases involving individuals who converted to Islam and then back to Christianity, who were attempting to recover their original Christian identities. Of these 148 individuals, 32 have received verdicts allowing them to recover their Christian identities and many of them have done so. The Government has not appealed any of these cases.

In contrast to the above-mentioned cases, the Government has not recognized conversions of individuals originally Muslim to Christianity or other religions, and resistance to such conversions by local officials has constituted a prohibition in practice. In the absence of a legal means to register their change in religious status, some converts resorted to soliciting illicit identity papers, often by submitting fraudulent supporting documents or bribing the government clerks who process the documents. In such cases, authorities periodically charged converts with violating laws prohibiting the falsification of documents.

Under Shari'a as interpreted by the Government, a non-Muslim wife who converts to Islam must divorce her "apostate," non-Muslim husband. Upon the wife's conversion, local security authorities ask the non-Muslim husband if he is willing to convert to Islam; if he chooses not to, divorce proceedings begin immediately. Custody of children is then awarded to the mother, following her conversion to Islam and the required divorce from her husband.

In April 2005 the Family Court granted the divorce of Wafaa Riffat Adly, a Christian woman who had converted to Islam, from her Christian husband, Said Farouk Adly, after he refused to convert.

An estimated several thousand persons were imprisoned because of alleged support for or membership in Islamist groups seeking to overthrow the Government. The Government stated that these persons were in detention because of membership in or activities on behalf of violent extremist groups, without regard to their religious affiliation. Internal security services monitor groups and individuals suspected of involvement in or planning for extremist activity. Internal security agencies regularly detain such persons, and the state of emergency allows them to renew periods of administrative detention ad infinitum.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion carried out by the Government; however, there were again reports of forced conversions of Coptic women and girls to Islam by Muslim men. Reports of such cases are disputed and often include inflammatory allegations and categorical denials of kidnapping and rape. Observers, including human rights groups, find it extremely difficult to determine whether compulsion was used, as most cases involve a female Copt who converts to Islam when she marries a Muslim male. Reports of such cases almost never appear in the local media.

During the reporting period, a Christian woman, Wafaa Constantin, whose alleged conversion to Islam in December 2004 had sparked significant protests in Cairo, remained in seclusion in a Coptic church facility.

There are reports in these cases of government authorities failing to uphold the law. Local authorities sometimes allow custody of a minor (age sixteen to twenty-one) Christian female who "converts" to Islam to be transferred to a Muslim custodian, who is likely to grant approval for an underage marriage. Some Coptic activists maintain that government officials do not respond effectively to instances of alleged kidnapping. In cases of marriage between an underage Christian girl and a Muslim man, there have been credible reports that government authorities have failed to cooperate with Christian families seeking to regain custody of their daughters.

According to the Instructions of the Notary Public, which implement Law 114 of 1947, persons age sixteen and above may convert to Islam without parental consent. Ignorance of the law and social pressure, including the centrality of marriage to a woman's identity, often affect a girl's decision to convert. Family conflict and financial pressure also are cited as factors.

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 small Jewish community numbers approximately 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. For example, the satellite-broadcast Nile Culture TV on November 27 2005 broadcast a program entitled "A Study of Israel's History" wherein a narrator said that Jews "extorted the world by exaggerating what was done to them in World War II, and they are still benefiting from this extortion, in the form of money and aid, from countries that still have a guilt complex regarding Hitler's crematoria—for which there is no proof, except for the Zionists' propaganda." The program also presented the views of journalist Mohammad Al-Qudussi, who said, "in the six years or so of World War II, it is not possible that six million Jews could have been burnt."

On December 12, 2005, columnist Hisham Abd Al-Rauf, in an article entitled "Israel's Lies" in the government-owned, limited-circulation evening newspaper Al-Masaa, asserted that Nazi gas chambers "were no more than rooms for disinfecting clothing." Addressing Western governments Abd Al-Rauf asked, "If you feel sorry of [sic] the poor Jews, why don't you establish their country on your lands?" The Government has urged journalists and cartoonists to avoid anti-Semitic commentary. Government officials insist that anti-Semitic statements in the media are a reaction to Israeli government actions against Palestinians and do not reflect historical anti-Semitism; however, there are relatively few public attempts to distinguish between anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli sentiment.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government took several steps to encourage religious freedom and tolerance. In November 2005 the NCHR announced the formation of a "Citizenship Committee," with a focus on religious freedom issues. In the aftermath of the October 2005 sectarian violence in Alexandria, the NCHR and a collection of human rights groups held a symposium in Alexandria and called for the Government to pass a unified law for all religious groups governing the construction and repair of houses of worship.

President Mubarak's Decree 291 of 2005 devolved authority for renovation and reconstruction of churches from the president to the country's twenty-six governors. Observers welcomed this step as a major improvement, but some churches have continued to face delays in the issuance of permits.

Al-Azhar maintained a schedule of interfaith discussions inside the country and abroad. The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Tantawi, a government appointee, and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda participated in joint public events.

In March 2006 the NCHR released its second annual report, in which it recommended a solution for official recognition of Baha'is, addressed the problem of Jehovah's Witnesses in the country, and criticized religious textbooks in schools 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.

A prominent Coptic nongovernmental organization (NGO), the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS), continued its program of interreligious dialogue in cooperation with the Ministry of Islamic Religious Endowments. The program encouraged interaction between young Muslim and Christian religious leaders and included a major conference on citizenship and education, as well as a series of workshops, training courses, and seminars throughout the reporting period.

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to take steps to contain incidents of sectarian violence, including those of October 2005 and April 2006 in Alexandria.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Muslim and Christian citizens share a common history and national identity. They also share the same ethnicity, race, culture, and language. Christians are geographically dispersed throughout the country, and Christians and Muslims live as

neighbors. However, at times religious tensions have arisen and individual acts of prejudice and violence occur.

On August 20, 2005, the Marg district of Cairo witnessed sectarian tensions after worshippers at a church adjacent to a mosque protested the ownership of the small strip of land separating the buildings. The security services intervened to disperse a crowd of several thousand protestors. Local officials brokered a deal whereby the church received compensation for the disputed land, along with a permit to expand its building.

In October 2005 Muslims protested an earlier production at the Mar Guirguis Church of a theatrical presentation that purportedly blasphemed Islam. There were also reports that the play had been recorded on DVD. On October 19, a lone Muslim man assaulted a novitiate and a lay worker at the church. On October 21, after Friday Islamic prayers, a large crowd, variously estimated between 1 thousand and 3 thousand persons, gathered outside the church. After some in the crowd threatened the church, security forces used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd. Three Muslim protesters died in the ensuing violence. No one had been brought to trial by the end of the period covered by this report.

In Kafr Salama village, Sharqiya governorate, a December 10 2005 altercation between a Muslim and a Christian resulted in the death of the Muslim. Muslim villagers later attacked the Abu Sifin Church and several Christian homes, and looted several shops before the authorities restored order.

In April 2006 as the Coptic Orthodox community prepared to celebrate Palm Sunday, Mahmud Salaheddin Abdul Razzak, a Muslim man, carried out sequential knife attacks at three Alexandria churches, which resulted in the death of seventy-eight-year-old Noshi Atta Guirgis and injuries to more than a dozen other Christians. The police quickly arrested the twenty-five-year-old Razzak, who had a history of mental illness, and charged him in the murder and assaults. A government fact-finding committee from the People's Assembly, headed by Deputy PA Speaker Dr. Zainab Radwan and including MPs Georget Qellini and Edward El-Dahabi, had not formally visited Alexandria or released its findings by the end of the reporting period.

At Guirgis's funeral on April 15, and again on April 16, Christian and Muslim protestors clashed in riots that resulted in the death of least one Muslim, dozens of injuries, significant damage to property belonging primarily to Copts, and some damage to churches.

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 Embassy officials. The Embassy maintains formal contacts with the Office of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Embassy also discusses religious freedom issues regularly in contacts with other government officials, including governors and members of parliament. The ambassador has made public statements supporting interfaith understanding and efforts toward harmony and equality among citizens of all religious groups. Specifically, the Embassy has raised its concerns about official discrimination against Baha'is with the Government. The Government insists that religious identification on national identity cards is necessary to determine which laws apply in civil cases.

The Embassy maintains an active dialogue with leaders of the Christian and Muslim religious communities, human rights groups, and other activists. The Embassy investigates every complaint of official religious discrimination brought to its attention. 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 other journalists.

U.S. programs and activities support initiatives in several areas directly related to religious freedom, including funding for CEOSS programs that work with Coptic community groups in Upper Egypt.

The U.S. Government is working to strengthen civil society, supporting secular channels and the broadening of a civic culture that promote religious tolerance. The U.S. Embassy supports projects that promote tolerance and mutual respect between members of different religious communities.

The Embassy supports the development of materials that encourage tolerance, diversity, and understanding of others, in both Arabic-language and English-language curriculums.

The U.S. 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 declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam, and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." The Government restricts freedom of religion.

There was a further deterioration of the extremely poor status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, most notably for Baha'is and Sufi Muslims. The country's religious minorities include Sunni and Sufi Muslims, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians. There were reports of imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on religious beliefs.

Government actions and rhetoric created a threatening atmosphere for nearly all religious minorities, especially Baha'is and Sufi Muslims. To a lesser extent, Zoroastrians, evangelical Christians, and the small Jewish community were also targets of government harassment. Government-controlled media, including broadcasting and print, intensified negative campaigns against religious minorities—particularly the Baha'is—following the June 2005 election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

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 towards states where religious freedom is a concern. Since 1999 the 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.

In 2003, the U.N. General Assembly passed Resolution 58/195 on the human rights situation in the country; it expressed serious concern about the continued discrimination against religious minorities by the Government. In 2004, the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the human rights situation in Iran. 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 Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief issued a statement of concern about the treatment of the Baha'i community in the country. The Special Rapporteur's statement claimed that Supreme Leader Khamene'i has instructed security officials to identify and compile information on Baha'is.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 631,660 square miles, and its population was an estimated 69 million. The population was approximately 98 percent Muslim, of which an estimated 89 percent were Shi'a and 8 percent were Sunni, mostly Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the southwest, southeast, and northwest. Although there are no official statistics of the size of the Sufi Muslim population, some reports estimated between two to five million people practice Sufism compared to approximately 100,000 before 1979.

According to the country's most recent official national census, taken in 1996, there were an estimated 59.8 million Muslims, 30,000 Zoroastrians, 79,000 Christians, and 13,000 Jews, with 28,000 "others" and 47,000 "not stated."

Recent unofficial estimates provide larger numbers for non-Muslim minority groups. Baha'is, Jews, Christians, Mandaeans, and Zoroastrians constitute approximately five percent of the population combined. The largest non-Muslim minority was the Baha'i community, which had an estimated 300,000 to 350,000 adherents throughout the country. Credible estimates on the size of the Jewish community vary from 25,000 to 30,000. This figure represents a substantial reduction from the estimated 75,000 to 80,000 Jews who resided in the country prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution. According to U.N. figures, there were approximately 300,000 Christians, the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians. Unofficial estimates indi-

cated an Assyrian Christian population of approximately 10,000. There also were Protestant denominations, including evangelical churches. The Mandaean Sabaeans, a community whose religion draws on pre-Christian gnostic beliefs, numbered approximately 5,000 to 10,000 persons, with members residing primarily in Khuzestan in the southwest. There were indications that members of all religious minorities are emigrating at a higher rate.

The Government estimated the Zoroastrian population had approximately 30,000 to 35,000 adherents; however, Zoroastrian groups claim an estimated 60,000 adherents. Zoroastrians mainly were ethnic Persians concentrated in the cities of Tehran, Kerman, and Yazd. Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the pre-Islamic Sassanid Empire and played a central role in the country's history.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Government severely restricts freedom of religion. The Constitution declares the "official religion of Iran is Islam and the doctrine followed is that of Ja'fari (Twelver) Shi'ism." All laws and regulations must be consistent with the official interpretation of the Shari'a (Islamic law). The Constitution states that "within the limits of the law," Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians are the only recognized religious minorities who are guaranteed freedom to practice their religion; however, members of these recognized minority religious groups have reported imprisonment, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination based on their religious beliefs.

Adherents of religious groups not recognized by the Constitution do not enjoy freedom to practice their beliefs. This restriction seriously affects adherents of the Baha'i faith, which the government regards as a heretical Islamic group with a political orientation that is antagonistic to the country's Islamic revolution. However, Baha'is view themselves not as Muslims, but as an independent religion with origins in the Shi'a Islamic tradition. Government officials have stated that, as individuals, all Baha'is are entitled to their beliefs and are protected under the articles of the Constitution as citizens; however, the Government continued to prohibit Baha'is from teaching and practicing their faith. Baha'is also faced discrimination in the workplace and are barred from government posts.

The tricameral government structure is ruled over by a supreme religious jurisconsult, or "supreme leader." The supreme leader, chosen by a group of eighty-three Islamic scholars who are elected to the Assembly of Experts, oversees the country's decision-making process. All acts of the majlis (legislative body or 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 does not have voting rights. The supreme leader is also advised by the Expediency Council, which has the authority to mediate disputes between Parliament and the Council of Guardians.

The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance (Ershad) and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) monitor religious activity closely. Adherents of recognized religious minorities were not required to register individually with the Government; however, their communal, religious, and cultural events and organizations, including schools, are monitored closely. Registration of Baha'is is a police function. The Government pressured evangelical Christian groups to compile and submit membership lists for their congregations, but evangelicals resisted this demand. Non-Muslim owners of grocery shops were required to indicate their religious affiliation on the fronts of their shops.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

By law and practice, religious minorities are not allowed to be elected to a representative body or to hold senior government or military positions, with the exception that 5 of a total 270 seats in the majlis are reserved for religious minorities. Three of these seats are reserved for members of the Christian faith, including two seats for the country's Armenian Christians, and one for Assyrians and Chaldeans. There is also one seat for a member of the Jewish faith, and one for a member of the Zoroastrian faith. While members of the Sunni Muslim minority do not have reserved seats in the majlis, they were allowed to serve in the body. Sunni members tend to come from the larger Sunni communities. Members of religious minorities are allowed to vote. All of the minority religious groups, including Sunni Muslims, were barred from being elected president.

All religious minorities suffer varying degrees of officially sanctioned discrimination, particularly in the areas of employment, education, and housing. Reportedly, religious minorities are allowed to handle food and own food businesses, but in prac-

tice most Muslim conservatives will not eat food prepared by Jews. Consequently, Jews are discouraged from owning food businesses. The government does not protect the right of 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. Apostasy, specifically conversion from Islam, may be punishable by death. While there were no reported cases of the death penalty being applied for apostasy during the reporting period, on November 22, 2005, unidentified persons killed a man who had converted to Christianity more than ten years earlier. He had allegedly received death threats over the past few years. Reportedly, his death was followed by repression of and threats against other Christians, including arrests of ten Christians.

Members of religious minorities, excluding Sunni Muslims, were prevented from serving in the judiciary and security services and from becoming public school principals. Applicants for public sector employment were 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 Baha'is. Government workers who did not observe Islam's principles and rules were 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 were exempt from military service. The law forbids non-Muslims from holding officer positions over Muslims in the armed forces. Members of religious minorities with a college education could serve as an officer during their mandatory military service but could not be a career military officer.

University applicants were required to pass an examination in Islamic, Christian, or Jewish theology, but there was no test for the Baha'i faith. All public school students, including non-Muslims, must study Islam. With the exception of Baha'is, the Government generally allowed recognized religious minorities to conduct religious education for their adherents, 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.

The legal system discriminates against religious minorities. In 2004 the Expediency Council approved appending a note to Article 297 of the 1991 Islamic Punishments Act, authorizing collection of equal "blood money" (diyeh) for the death of Muslims and non-Muslims. All women and Baha'i men were excluded from the equalization provisions of the bill. According to law, Baha'i blood is considered Mobah, meaning it can be spilled with impunity.

Sunni Muslims are the largest religious minority in the country, claiming a membership of approximately five and a half million (eight percent of the population), consisting mostly of Turkmen, Arabs, Baluchs, and Kurds living in the Southwest, Southeast, and Northwest. The Constitution provides Sunni Muslims a large degree of religious freedom, although it forbids a Sunni Muslim from becoming president. Sunnis claimed that the Government discriminated against them; however, it was difficult to distinguish whether the cause of discrimination was religious or ethnic since most Sunnis were also members of ethnic minorities. Sunnis cited the lack of a Sunni mosque in Tehran, despite the presence of more than one million adherents there, as a prominent example of this discrimination. Sunni leaders reported bans on Sunni religious literature and Sunni teachings in public schools, even in predominantly Sunni areas. Sunnis also claimed there was a lack of Sunni representation in appointed offices in provinces where they form a majority, such as Kurdistan and Khuzestan province, as well as their reported inability to obtain senior governmental positions. In addition, Sunnis charged that the Broadcast Corporation's program Voice and Vision, airs programming which were insulting to them.

In April 2004 Sunni majlis representatives sent a letter to Supreme Leader Khamene'i decrying the lack of Sunni presence in the executive and judiciary branches of government, especially in higher-ranking positions in embassies, universities, and other institutions. They called on Khamene'i to issue a decree halting anti-Sunni propaganda in the mass media, books, and publications; the measure would include the state-run media. The Sunni representatives also requested adherence to the Constitutional articles ensuring equal treatment of all ethnic groups.

The Baha'i faith originated in the country during the 1840s as a reformist movement within Shi'a Islam. The Government considers Baha'is to be apostates because of their claim to a valid religious revelation subsequent to that of Muhammad, but

Baha'is do not consider themselves to be Muslim. Rather, the government defines the Baha'i faith as a political "sect," linked to the Pahlavi regime but Baha'is faced discrimination prior to the revolution. A 2001 Ministry of Justice report stated that Baha'is would be permitted to enroll in schools only if they did not identify themselves as Baha'is, and that Baha'is preferably should be enrolled in schools with a strong and imposing religious ideology. There are allegations that Baha'i children in public schools have faced attempts to convert them to Islam. The Ministry of Justice report also stated that Baha'is must be excluded or expelled from universities, either in the admission process or during the course of their studies, once their religious affiliation becomes known.

Baha'is may not teach or practice their faith or maintain links with co-religionists abroad. The fact that the Baha'i world headquarters (established by the founder of the Baha'i faith in the nineteenth century, in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine) is situated in what is now the state of Israel exposes Baha'is to official charges of "espionage on behalf of Zionism." These charges were more acute when Baha'is were caught communicating with or sending monetary contributions to the Baha'i headquarters.

Baha'is are banned from government employment and government pensions. In addition Baha'is were regularly denied compensation for injury or criminal victimization and were denied the right to inherit property. Baha'i marriages and divorces were 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 Baha'is community from official assembly and from maintaining administrative institutions by actively closing such Baha'i institutions. Since the Baha'i faith had no established clergy, the denial of the right to form such institutions and elect officers threatened its existence in the country.

Broad restrictions on Baha'is undermined their ability to function as a community. Baha'is repeatedly were offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith.

Baha'i cemeteries, holy places, historical sites, administrative centers, and other assets were seized shortly after the 1979 Revolution. No properties have been returned, and many have been destroyed. Baha'is were not allowed to bury and honor their dead in adherence to their religious tradition. Baha'i graveyards in Yazd and other cities have been desecrated, and the government did not seek to identify or punish the perpetrators. Public and private universities continue to deny admittance to Baha'i students. In 2004, for the first time, Baha'i applicants were permitted to take part in the nationwide exam for entrance into state-run universities. However, for those students who passed the exam, "Islam" was pre-printed as a prospective student's religious affiliation on the form authorizing their matriculation. This action precluded Baha'i enrollment in the country's state-run universities since a tenet of Baha'i faith is to not deny one's faith. Only a few students were allowed to enroll. In 2005, after similar treatment, no Baha'i students were accepted. A statement posted on Ayatollah Safi's official website during the reporting period reiterated the policy that Baha'is must be expelled from university once their affiliation was known.

The Government monitored the activities of those it identified as adhering to the Baha'i Faith. The U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief became aware 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 members of the Baha'i Faith. There were also reports the Association of Chambers of Commerce compiled a list of Baha'i members and their trades and employment. A May 2, 2006, letter from the Trades, Production, and Technical Services Society of Kermanshah to the Union of Battery Manufacturers shows further evidence of workplace restrictions as it asks the union to compile "a list of the names of those who belong to the Baha'i sect and are under the jurisdiction of your union."

In principle, but with some exceptions, there was little restriction of or interference with Jewish religious practice; however, education of Jewish children had 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 were permitted to obtain passports and travel outside the country, but they were often denied the multiple-exit permits normally issued to other citizens and faced numerous obstacles from officials to travel abroad. With the exception of certain business travelers, the authorities required Jews to obtain clearance and pay additional fees before each round trip abroad. Members of all religious minorities appeared to be emigrating in higher numbers even though immigration was illegal under Iranian law.

According to the U.N. High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) background paper on the country, the Mandaean Sabaeans were regarded as Christians and were included among the country's three recognized religious minorities. However, Mandaean Sabaeans regarded themselves not as Christians but as adherents of a religion that predates Christianity in both belief and practice. Mandaean Sabaeans enjoyed official support as a distinct religion prior to the Revolution, but their legal status as a religion since then was the subject of debate in the majlis, which has not been clarified. The small community faced discrimination similar to that faced by the country's other religious minorities. There were reports that members of the Mandaean Sabaeans community experienced societal discrimination and pressure to convert to Islam, and they often were denied access to higher education. Mandaean Sabaeans refugees reported specific religious freedom violations and concerns, such as being forced to observe Islamic fasting rituals and to pray in Islamic fashion, both in direct violation of Mandaean Sabaeans teaching.

Sufis within the country and Sufi organizations outside the country remained extremely concerned about growing government repression of Sufi communities and their religious practices, including the constant harassment and intimidation of prominent Sufi leaders by the intelligence and security services. Government restrictions on Sufi groups and houses of worship became more pronounced during the year covered by this report. Although laws governing Sufi practice were ambiguous, there are reports that the Government called for a full ban on the practice of Sufism. Since 1979, the numbers of practicing Sufis have soared, increasing tension with the Government.

The Government propagated an interpretation of Islam that effectively deprived women of some rights granted to men. Gender segregation was enforced generally throughout the country without regard to religious affiliation and could be burdensome for those who do not follow strict Islamic religious codes; however, as a practical matter these prohibitions have loosened in recent years. Women of all religious groups were expected to adhere to Islamic dress in public, although enforcement of rules for conservative Islamic dress eased in recent years.

In 1986 the Government issued a twelve†point contract to serve as a model for marriage and divorce, which limited the privileges accorded to women by custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law.

Many female Muslims were seeking to eliminate laws and practices that discriminate against women, arguing that relegating women to a lesser status due to, inter alia, their being considered "deficient in reason" was not a precept of Islam, but rather a non-Islamic accretion to Islamic practices.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The property rights of Baha'is were generally disregarded, and they suffer frequent government harassment and persecution. Since 1979 the government has confiscated large numbers of private and business properties belonging to Baha'is, as well as religious material. Numerous Baha'i homes reportedly were seized and handed over to an agency of Supreme Leader Khamene'i. Sources indicated that property was confiscated in Rafsanjan, Kerman, Marv-Dasht, and Yazd. Authorities reportedly also confiscated Baha'i properties in Kata, forced several families to leave their homes and farmlands, imprisoned some farmers, and did not permit others to harvest their crops. In one instance, a Baha'i woman from Esfahan who legally traveled abroad, returned to find that her home was confiscated. The Government also seized private homes in which Baha'i youth classes were held despite the owners having proper ownership documents.

The Baha'i community claimed the Government's seizure of Baha'i personal property and its denial of Baha'i access to education and employment were eroding the economic base of the community and threatened its survival. On June 29, 2006 the UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing found that government expropriations of property in Iran "seem to have targeted disproportionately" the property of Baha'is 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 Baha'i [were] legally and religiously justifiable." There were recent reports of authorities forcing Baha'i busi-

nesses to close and placing restrictions on their businesses. Managers of private companies were reportedly asked to dismiss their Baha'i employees.

The Government continued to imprison and detain Baha'is based on their religious beliefs. The Government harassed the Baha'i community by arbitrarily arresting Baha'is and charging them with violating Islamic penal code Articles 500 and 698, relating to activities against the State and spreading falsehood, respectively. Often the charges were not dropped upon release and those with charges still pending against them reportedly feared re-arrest at any time. Most were released only after paying large fines or posting high bails.

In 2004, authorities initiated the destruction of the tomb of Quddus, a Baha'i holy site. Local Baha'is attempted to prevent the destruction through legal channels, but the tomb was destroyed in the interim. The Baha'is were not allowed permission to enter the site and retrieve the remains of this revered Baha'i figure. The house of Mizra Buzarg-e-Nuri, father of the faith's founder, was destroyed without notice.

According to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States, since 1979 more than 200 Baha'is were killed, 15 disappeared and were presumed dead, and more than 10,000 Baha'is were dismissed from government and university jobs.

In 2004, a Baha'i optician in Hamadan was reportedly kidnapped and brutally attacked by five individuals, who threatened him with death if he did not recant his faith and convert to Islam. Local authorities were unwilling to pursue the case and a local judicial official reportedly told him "it would cost him [the victim] dearly" if he pursued his complaint against the assailants.

In 2004, for the first time, the Baha'i community wrote an open letter to the Government of the Islamic Republic, addressed to President Khatami, seeking an end to Baha'i-focused human rights and religious freedom abuses. Numerous anecdotal reports indicated a marked increase in government persecution of Baha'is after this letter. Much of this anti-Baha'i activity focused on Yazd, presumably due to Yazdi Baha'is having presented Yazd intelligence-security officials with a copy of the letter.

In late 2004 and January 2005, nine Baha'is in Yazd were arrested and briefly detained, and their homes searched and some possessions confiscated. On January 14, 2005, authorities summoned, questioned, and released another Yazd Baha'i, and four days later on January 18, four individuals came to his home and beat him with batons, inflicting severe injuries to his face, back, and arms. The same individuals, equipped with batons and communication devices, also attacked the home of another Baha'i later that day. On that same day, these same persons went to the home of a third Baha'i and attacked him with batons, causing serious head wounds. This third Baha'i was attacked again on January 25; on January 27 his shop was set on fire.

In February 2005, the Baha'i cemetery in Yazd was destroyed, with cars driven over the graves, tombstones smashed, and the remains of the interred left exposed. Two days later, a gravestone was removed and left in front of a Baha'is home, along with a threatening letter. The Baha'i community filed a complaint with authorities at the national level, but no action was taken. These events coincided with the launch of a campaign of defamation against the Baha'i faith in government-controlled media.

In February 2005, two Baha'is were released from prison after serving almost fifteen years on charges related to their religious beliefs.

In March 2005, a series of Baha'i arrests and imprisonments began throughout the country. In Tehran on March 6 2005, intelligence officials arrested and took into custody three prominent Baha'is, and another was arrested and imprisoned on March 16. Agents conducted prolonged searches of their homes and confiscated documents, books, and other belongings. They were all detained without charge, and released after having posted bail.

On March 8 2005, one of the Baha'is previously arrested and briefly detained for having distributed an open letter from the Baha'i community to President Khatami, received a three-year sentence and was incarcerated in Evin prison. He did not have access to lawyers nor to any form of legal counsel. Another Baha'i previously arrested and detained, was tried in absentia and given a one-year sentence for the same alleged offence.

On April 25 2005, five more Baha'is were arrested and imprisoned, all members of farming families whose properties had been confiscated in the village of Kata, when they obeyed a summons and came to the court for hearings concerning their grievances. On May 3 2005, four more Baha'is from Kata answered a similar summons and appeared before a court in the same province. The judge asked them if they would relinquish their property, and when they refused, the judge ordered

their arrest and detention. Later that month, all nine were released from prison after a business license was used as collateral.

On May 16 2005, nine Baha'is were summoned to appear before the office of the Public Prosecutor in the city of Semnan. They were charged with "creating anxiety in the minds of the public and those of the Iranian officials" and distributing "propaganda against the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran" for having distributed copies of the November 2004 open letter to various government officials. They were detained and subsequently released, with the understanding that they would appear for a hearing at a later date.

Between August 2005 and May 2006, eighty-seven Baha'is were arrested (but only eighty-six were detained). At the end of the period covered by this report, two remained in prison. Most of the others were never formally charged but they were only released after posting bail. For some, bail was deeds of property worth approximately $11,000; others were released in exchange for personal guarantees or work licenses. Some were not allowed to resume working for six months after their detention. There were also reports of attacks on Baha'is by unidentified assailants.

In the first week of August 2005, fourteen Baha'is were arrested from several cities, including Tehran. They were held in incommunicado detention, and there was concern from several sources that they were at risk of torture or ill treatment. During the rest of August and during September, nine more Baha'is were arrested in various cities. On September 17 and 19, three were released on bail. On September 5, four Baha'is were sentenced to ten months of imprisonment for opposition to the government. On the same day, the homes of nine Baha'is were searched in Yazd, and books, computers, tapes, videos, and CDs were confiscated.

On December 19, 2005, the longest imprisoned Baha'i, Zabihullah Mahrami, died in prison of unknown causes. He was arrested in 1995 and convicted of apostasy in 1996. He was forced to engage in hard labor at the penitentiary and regularly received death threats. His family was told he died of a heart attack, but Mahrami was reportedly in good health prior to his death.

On January 15, 2006, three Baha'is from Kermanshah were arrested on charges of "involvement in Baha'i activities and insulting Islam." Their homes and four others were raided the same day and books, documents, and other items were confiscated. On January 16, the Revolutionary Court set property worth more than US$30,000 as collateral for the three Baha'is, and they were released on January 20. On February 5, 2006, three Baha'is from Esfahan were arrested for coordinating Baha'i activities.

On March 18, 2006, Mehran Kawsari was released from jail without bail. He was tried in connection with the November 2004 open letter to then President Khatami that requested the restoration of human rights for the Baha'is and was charged with taking measures against the internal security of the government.

From May 9 to 11, 2006, eleven Baha'i homes were raided in Shahinshahr, Najafabad, and Kashan but no arrests were made. On May 19, six Baha'i homes were raided in Shiraz, and notebooks, computers, books, and documents were seized. The homeowners were among the fifty-four Baha'is arrested that day. The individuals were mostly youths engaged in humanitarian service. With permission from the Islamic Council of Shiraz, they were teaching classes to poor children as part of a UNICEF program. On May 24–25, fifty-one out of fifty-four of the detainees were released. As of June 14, the remaining three had been released, initially for collateral payments of $54,600 per person but in the end solely based on personal guarantees.

On June 13, 2006, one Baha'i man from Sanandaj was arrested and released on June 29 on unknown terms. There was an unconfirmed report of five more arrests in Shiraz, but no further information is yet available. On June 18, three Baha'is from Hamadan were arrested after government officials confiscated books, computers, and Baha'i documents, but they were released on bail on June 21. No details of the terms of their release were available. On June 21, one Baha'i from Baluchistan province was reportedly abducted, and authorities said they suspected criminal elements were involved. On June 28, one Baha'i was taken into custody and was being held in the Ministry of Information's detention center. This individual was previously arrested and released in August 2005.

The Government vigilantly enforced its prohibition on proselytizing activities by evangelical Christians by closely monitoring their activities, closing their churches, and arresting Christian converts. Members of evangelical congregations were required to carry membership cards, photocopies of which must be provided to the authorities. Worshippers were subject to identity checks by authorities posted outside congregation centers. The Government restricted meetings for evangelical services to Sundays and church officials were ordered to inform the Ministry of Information and Islamic Guidance before admitting new members to their congregations.

Conversion of a Muslim to a non-Muslim religion is considered apostasy under the law and is punishable by the death penalty, although it was unclear whether this punishment had been enforced in recent years. Similarly, non-Muslims could not proselytize Muslims without putting their own lives at risk. Evangelical church leaders were subject to pressure from authorities to sign pledges that they would not evangelize Muslims or allow Muslims to attend church services.

In previous years, the Government harassed churchgoers in Tehran, in particular worshippers of the capital's Assembly of God congregation. This harassment included conspicuous monitoring outside Christian premises by Revolutionary Guards to discourage Muslims or converts from entering church premises, as well as demands for the presentation of the identity papers of worshippers inside. In 2004, there were reports of the arrest of several dozen evangelical Christians in the north, including a Christian pastor, his wife, and their two teenage children in Chalous, Mazandaran Province. Many of those arrested were later released, and the pastor and his family were released after six weeks in detention. One press source reported that authorities ordered those jailed to stop meeting for worship and to "stop talking about Jesus." Christians continued to be subject to harassment and close surveillance. Low scale harassment of Armenian Christians were reported, including situating Shi'a Ashura sites near churches and schools.

In 2004, security officials raided the annual general conference of the country's Assemblies of God Church, arresting approximately eighty religious leaders gathered at the church's denominational center in Karaj. After fingerprinting and questioning, authorities released all but ten pastors later that day. Of these, nine were released. Assemblies of God Pastor Hamid Pourmand, a former Muslim of Assyrian Christian background who converted to Christianity nearly twenty-five years ago and who led a congregation in Bushehr, was the only detainee not released. Later that year, Pourmand, who was also a non-commissioned officer in the Army, was moved to a military prison. In late January 2005 he was tried in a military court on charges of espionage. On February 16, 2005, he was found guilty of espionage and sentenced to three years, and was transferred to Evin prison to serve his sentence. A military appeals court subsequently affirmed the verdict and the sentence. As a consequence, Pourmand faced automatic discharge from the army and forfeit of his entire income, pension, and housing for his family. In mid-April, the authorities abandoned preliminary hearings against Pourmand before a Tehran General and Revolutionary Court on two separate charges of apostasy and proselytizing, both capital crimes, reportedly after news of his trial leaked out to the international press. In May, he was transferred from Tehran to his home city of Bushehr to stand trial in a General and Revolutionary Court on these charges. On May 28, that court acquitted Pourmand on apostasy and proselytizing charges, and he was sent back to Tehran's Evin prison to serve out the remainder of his three-year prison sentence. In August 2005, there were reports that he continued to face pressure from prison officials to recant his Christian faith and return to Islam.

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 ten Christians in several cities.

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 prosecution if he did not leave the country. He was interrogated and was held incommunicado. So far no charges have been filed against him.

In 2000, ten of thirteen Jews arrested in 1999 were convicted on charges of illegal contact with Israel, conspiracy to form an illegal organization, and recruiting agents. Along with two Muslim defendants, the ten Jews received prison sentences ranging from four to thirteen years. During and shortly after the trial, Jewish-owned businesses in Tehran and Shiraz were targets of vandalism and boycotts, and Jews reportedly suffered personal harassment and intimidation. There was one report of vandalism against a synagogue during the reporting period.

Numerous Sunni clerics were killed in recent years, some allegedly by government agents. While the exact reason for their killings was unknown, most Sunni Muslims in the country belonged to ethnic minorities who historically suffered abuses by the Government. During this reporting period, 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 no reports of government harassment of the Zoroastrian community during the reporting period; however, the community remained unable to convene a Spiritual Assembly to manage its religious affairs for fear of official retaliation, and there were reports of discrimination in employment and education. In 2004, Zoroastrians were able to make, apparently without government interference, their annual pilgrimage to one of the holiest sites of their faith, the temple of Chak-Chak (near the city of Yazd).

Reports of government harassment and abuse of Sufis became prevalent during this reporting period due to the increasing intolerance towards the Sufi community from the Government. On February 13, 2006, police officers tried to close a Sufi house of worship, or Husseinieh in the city of Qom, sparking two 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 three years ago with municipal permission. According to some human rights groups, the Sufis, including many women and children, were peacefully protesting the order to leave the Husseinieh. The police attacked the Sufis in the building with tear gas and explosives, causing over 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.

On February 14, 2006, the security forces demolished the building and neighboring houses, and more than 1,000 persons were arrested, according to several sources. Other sources close to the Sufi groups and human rights activists reported 2000 arrests. At least 173 were detained at Fajr prison and were reportedly tortured in order to extract confessions that would be read on national television. Those who were released had to sign agreements saying they would not attend Sufi gatherings in Qom and would present themselves to intelligence offices. Some reportedly were required to sign documents renouncing Sufism.

On May 4, a court sentenced fifty-two Sufis to jail on various charges in connection with the February incident. The defendants and their two lawyers were sentenced to a year in prison, fines, and seventy-four lashes. The lawyers, Farshid Yadollahi and Omid Behrouzi, were also banned from practicing law for five years.

The government carefully monitors the statements and views of the country's senior Shi'a religious leaders. Several Shi'a religious leaders have been under house arrest for years, including Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, who was released after five years of house arrest in 2003.

The Special Clerical Court (SCC) system, established in 1987 to investigate offenses and crimes committed by clerics and which the Supreme Leader oversees directly, is not provided for in the Constitution and operates outside the domain of the judiciary. In particular, critics alleged that the clerical courts were used to prosecute certain clerics for expressing controversial ideas and for participating in activities outside the area of religion, including journalism.

On February 6, 2005, the special clerical court agreed to the conditional release (parole) of prominent dissident cleric Hojatoleslam Hassan Yussefi Eshkevari; he had served two thirds of his seven-year sentence and was therefore eligible for parole under the law. The cleric had been arrested in 2000, charged with the capital crimes of apostasy and "corruption on earth," in conjunction with speeches he had made at a 2000 conference on reform in Berlin.

Laws based on religion have been used to stifle freedom of expression. Independent newspapers and magazines have been closed, and leading publishers and journalists were imprisoned on vague charges of "insulting Islam" or "calling into question the Islamic foundation of the Republic." In 2002 academic Hashem Aghajari was sentenced to death for blasphemy against Muhammad, based on a speech in which he challenged Muslims not to blindly follow the clergy, provoking an international and domestic outcry. In 2003 his death sentence was revoked by the Supreme Court, but the case was sent back to the lower court for retrial. He was retried on charges that did not include apostasy and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, two of which were suspended, and five years of additional "deprivation of social right" (meaning that he could not teach or write books or articles). His time served was counted towards his three-year sentence; the court converted the remainder of the time to a fine. He was released on bail in 2004.

Anti-Semitic Acts

While Jews are a recognized religious minority, allegations of official discrimination were frequent. The Government's anti-Israel policies, along with a perception among radical Muslims that all Jewish citizens supported Zionism and the state of Israel, created a hostile atmosphere for the small community. For example, in 2005

many newspapers celebrated the one-hundredth anniversary of the anti-Semitic publication Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Jewish leaders reportedly were reluctant to draw attention to official mistreatment of their community due to fear of government reprisal.

The Jewish community has been reduced to less than one-half of its pre-1979 size. Some of this emigration was connected with the larger, general waves of departures following the establishment of the Islamic Republic, but some also stems from continued anti-Semitism on the part of the government and within society.

In 2004, the country's Sahar 1 television station began airing a weekly series titled For You, Palestine, or Zahra's Blue Eyes, set in Israel and the West Bank. Produced in Farsi and subsequently translated into Arabic, this series depicted Israeli government, military, and civilian personnel harvesting organs from Palestinian children for the benefit of Israeli officials. Other anti-Semitic series shown on state-run Iranian television during this period included The People of the Cave, a supposedly historical drama series, and Al-Shatat. Al-Shatat, originally broadcasted by Hizbullah's Al-Manar television channel, portrayed Jewish persons as being responsible for most the world's problems, by conspiring to achieve political and economic domination over the world.

In April 2005, Ayatollah Hossein Nouri-Hamedani, one of the country's leading religious authorities, told a group of clerics that "one should fight the Jews and vanquish them," to prepare the ground and to hasten the advent of the Hidden Imam.

On April 13, Representative Moris Motamed, who represents Jews in the majlis, joined by the speaker of the majlis, complained that the state television was broadcasting anti-Semitic programs. According to the press, Motamed claimed that "insulting Jews and attributing false things to them in television serials over the past twelve years has not only hurt the feelings of the Jewish community but has also led to the emigration of a considerable percentage of the Jewish community." There were indications that anti-Semitic content in broadcasting decreased after these complaints.

The perception among some of the country's radicalized elements that Jews support Zionism and the state of Israel created a threatening atmosphere for the Jewish community 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 themselves, as opposed to the past practice of denouncing only "Israel" and "Zionism," adding to the threatening atmosphere for the community.

Since August 2005, President Ahmadinejad has pursued a virulent anti-Israel campaign, which created an even more hostile environment for the Jewish minority. In October 2005, the president called for Israel to "be wiped off the map." In December 2005, the president alleged that the Holocaust was a "myth." On December 16, 2005, the Friday prayer leaders endorsed the president's Holocaust statements and reported the statements were "the heartfelt words of all Muslims in the world". During this reporting period, there was a rise in officially sanctioned anti-Semitic propaganda in a reportedly coordinated plan involving official statements, media outlets, publications, and books. The rhetorical attacks also further blurred the line between Zionism and Judaism. This increasingly negative rhetoric, coupled with the tension surrounding the nuclear issue in the country, led to increased concerns about the future security of the Jewish community.

On January 26, 2006, the head of the Jewish community, Haroun Yashayaei, sent a letter to the president protesting his Holocaust denial comments. Yashayaei stated the comments and the recent Holocaust denial seminars have struck fear within the small Jewish community. On February 11, 2006 Moris Motamed, the Jewish parliamentarian, reported that the negative remarks were an insult to the Jewish communities.

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, a child born to a Muslim father automatically is considered a Muslim. Baha'is were repeatedly offered relief from mistreatment in exchange for recanting their faith, and several Sufi Muslims reportedly had to sign forced renunciations of their faith to be released from prison following the February riots.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religious groups by terrorist organizations during the reporting period.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The continuous presence of the country's pre-Islamic, non-Muslim communities, such as Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians, had accustomed the population to the participation of non-Muslims in society; however, government actions continued to create a threatening atmosphere for some religious minorities and became significantly worse throughout the reporting period. 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." Since August 2005 the government had intensified a campaign against non-Muslim religious minorities, and political and religious leaders issued a continual stream of inflammatory statements.

On November 21, 2005, the domestic press quoted Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, head of the Guardian Council, publicly attacking non-Muslims, calling them "sinful animals" and "corrupt." The remark was widely criticized in the country, and the majles representative of the Zoroastrian community publicly condemned his remarks and was consequently charged with the "dissemination of false information, slander, and insult." At year's end, no case had been pursued against him.

Christians faced an increase in abuse and harassment. Reportedly, the president allegedly called for an end to the development of Christianity in the country. The small Mandaean Sabaean religious community reportedly faced intensifying harassment and repression by authorities.

Since late 2005, Baha'is have faced an increasing number of public attacks, including a series negative and defamatory articles in Kayhan, the official Tehran daily newspaper. Kayhan is a government-controlled newspaper whose managing editor was appointed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i. Radio and television broadcasts have also increasingly condemned the Baha'is and their religion, and since October 2005 they have launched a series of weekly anti-Baha'i broadcasts. These reports had the intention of arousing suspicion, distrust, and hatred for the Baha'i community.

Since the National Association of Chambers of Commerce began collecting employment data on Baha'is, have been reported problems for Baha'is in different trades around the country. Baha'is have also experienced an escalation of personal harassment, including receiving threatening notes, CDs, text messages, and tracts. There were reported cases of Baha'i children being harassed in school and subjected to Islamic indoctrination. Baha'i girls were especially targeted, with the intention of creating tension between parents and children.

There has been 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 Baha'i Faith in order to hasten the return of the twelfth Imam or Mahdi. Though not a government organization, it is believed that many members of the current administration are Hojjatiyeh members and are using their offices to advance the society's goals. It was unknown, however, what role, if any, the group played in the recent arrests of numerous Baha'is throughout the country. Many Baha'i, human rights groups, and news agencies describe the goals of the Hojjatiyeh society as the pursuit of the eradication of the Baha'is, not just the Baha'i Faith. According to the Encyclopedia Iranica, however, the group's founder was reportedly distraught by violence against Baha'is. The group's anti-Baha'i orientation has reportedly widened to encompass anti-Sunni and Sufi activities as well. Rasul Montajabnia, a prominent member of the Militant Clerics Society—a key reformist clerical group—claimed that Hojjatiyeh members have actually stopped their fight against the Baha'i faith and turned their attention to creating divisions between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, mainly as a means of fomenting chaos to bring about the return of the Mahdi.

Sufi Muslims faced an increasing "demonization" campaign. 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. Articles attacking Sufis were printed in government-controlled, national newspapers, such as the 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. During the period covered by this report, several anti-Sufi books were published.

Sunni Muslims encounter religious discrimination at the local, provincial, and national levels. Religious leaders reported widespread restrictions on their practice and abuses, including detentions and torture of Sunni clerics. They also reported

bans on Sunni teachings in public schools and Sunni religious literature. The residents of provinces with large Sunni populations, including Kurdistan, Khuzestan, and Sistan-va Baluchistan report discrimination and lack of resources, but it is difficult to determine what is ethnic-based discrimination and what is religious-based.

In June 2003, an interfaith delegation of American Christians, Jews, and Muslims traveled to meet with religious, political, and cultural leaders. In April 2005 an interfaith delegation of Muslims, Christians, and Jews paid a return visit to the United States, attending an interfaith conference in the United States.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The United States has no diplomatic relations with the country, and thus it does not raise directly 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 Iran on religious freedoms and human rights.

From 1982 to 2001, the U.S. Government co-sponsored a resolution each year regarding the human rights situation in the country offered by the European Union at the annual meeting of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). It passed every year until 2002, when the United States did not have a seat on the Commission, and the resolution failed passage by one vote. The U.S. supported a similar resolution offered each year during the U.N. General Assembly until the fall of 2002, when no resolution was tabled. The U.S. Government strongly supported the work of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Iran and called on the government to grant him admission and allow him to conduct his research during the period of his mandate, which expired with the defeat of the resolution at the UNCHR in 2002. There also was no resolution on the country at the UNCHR in the spring of 2003. In 2003 the Canadian government introduced a resolution censuring the country's human rights policies, which was passed by the U.N. General Assembly. The U.S. has supported Canadian-sponsored resolutions censuring the government's treatment of religious minorities. In 2004, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution expressing serious concern about the continued discrimination of religious minorities. The U.S. Government remains supportive of efforts to raise the human rights situation whenever appropriate within international organizations.

On numerous occasions, the U.S. State Department spokesman has addressed the situation of the Baha'i and Jewish communities in the country. The U.S. Government has publicly condemned the treatment of the Baha'is in UN resolutions, including one that passed in the General Assembly in 2005. The U.S. Government has encouraged other governments to make similar statements.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated Iran as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

IRAQ

During the reporting period, 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. Following the U.S.-led coalition's removal of the Ba'athist regime in April 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the Iraqi Governing Council administered the country pursuant to UN Security Council Resolutions 1483, 1500, and 1511, until the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) was appointed on June 28, 2004. In January 2005, the country held its first free election, leading to the transitional government led by former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari in May 2005. During the October 15, 2005 referendum, voters adopted a Constitution and, in a first step toward establishing a permanent government, elected members of the country's new legislature on December 15, 2005. The permanent government, led by Prime Minister Noori al-Maliki and the Constitution, came into office May 20, 2006.

The Law for the Administration of the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period (TAL) was adopted on March 8, 2004, and was the operative law in the country until May 20, 2006 when the Constitution came into effect. The TAL and the Constitution established a republican, federal, democratic, and pluralistic system with

powers shared among the federal and regional governments, including eighteen governorates. The TAL and Constitution also guarantee freedom of thought, conscience, religious belief and practice.

Both the TAL and the Constitution recognize Islam as the official religion and state that no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam. While the Government generally endorsed these rights, its efforts to prevent or remedy violations were hampered by substantial political and religious violence between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and by harassment of non-Muslims.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Since 2003, the Government has not engaged in the persecution of any religious group, calling instead for tolerance and acceptance of all religious minorities. However, long-standing discriminatory practices against the Baha'i and Wahhabi Sunni Muslims continued by some government institutions.

While the Government generally respected the right of the individual to worship according to thought, conscience, and belief, private conservative and radical Islamic elements continued to exert tremendous pressure on other groups to conform to extremist interpretations of Islam's precepts. In addition, frequent attacks on religious places of worship, as well as sectarian violence, 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 tenth and eleventh 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, supported the inclusion of religious minorities in the political and Constitution drafting processes, and facilitated interfaith discussion with all members of the country's diverse religious communities.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 437,072 square miles and a population of 26 million. An estimated 97 percent of the population is Muslim. Shi'a Muslims—predominantly Arab, 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 approximately 18 to 20 percent are Sunni Kurds, 12 to 16 percent Sunni Arabs, and the remainder 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 Yazidis, Sabean-Mondarans, Baha'is, Kaka'is (a small, syncretic religious group located in and around Kirkuk), and a small number of Jews. Shi'a, although predominantly located in the south, were also a majority in Baghdad and had communities in most parts of the country. Sunnis formed the majority in the center and the north of the country.

According to official estimates, the number of Christians decreased from 1.4 million in 1987 to fewer than 1 million, with Catholics (Chaldeans) comprising the majority. Christian leaders estimated that approximately 700,000 Iraqi Christians lived abroad.

Four of the five largest Christian communities were located in Mosul (150,000), Erbil (20,000–25,000), Dohuk (13,000), and Kirkuk (12,000). According to church leaders in Erbil and Mosul, Christians in the north accounted for roughly 30 percent of the country's Christian population.

The Primate of the Armenian Diocese reported that approximately 20,000 Armenian Christians remained in the country, primarily in the cities of Baghdad (12,000), Basrah, Kirkuk, and Mosul.

There were approximately 225,000 Assyrian Christians and an estimated 750,000 Chaldeans (Eastern Rite Catholics). The Chaldean and Assyrian Christians are descendants of the earliest Christian communities, and they share a similar cultural and linguistic background. Both communities speak the same ancient language (Syriac); however, they are considered by many to be distinct ethnic groups. Chaldeans recognize the primacy of the Roman Catholic Pope, while the Assyrians, who are not Catholic, do not. While some Chaldeans and Assyrians considered themselves Arab, the majority, as well as the Government, considered both groups as ethnically distinct from Arabs and Kurds.

The Yazidi are a religious group with ancient origins that encompass several different religious traditions comprising elements of Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Gnostic beliefs and traditions. Yazidi do not intermarry with outsiders or accept converts. Defined by the former regime as Arabs, some Yazidi considered themselves to be Kurds, while others defined themselves as

both religiously and ethnically distinct from Muslim Kurds. Most of the 650,000 Yazidi resided in the North.

Sabeans are an ancient religious group dating from the first three centuries and reflect numerous religious influences, including ancient Gnostic, Jewish, and Christian beliefs. The Sabean community continued to decline; according to Sabean leaders, an estimated 10,000 remained in the country. While some Sabeans fled the tyranny of the former regime, this decline could also be attributed to the fact that converts are not accepted, and those Sabeans who marry Christians or Muslims are no longer regarded as Sabean. 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. The Sunni and Shi'a waqfs, or religious endowments, accepted applications from the public and submitted them to the Supreme Council for the Hajj.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution mirrors many of the same religious freedoms provided when the TAL was in effect. Both provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. While the Government endorsed this right, its efforts to prevent or remedy violations were hampered by substantial political and religious violence between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims and by harassment of non-Muslims.

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 that right. Article 43 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. 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. The second clause of Article 43 of the Constitution reiterates this by explicitly guaranteeing the freedom of worship and the protection of places of worship.

Deficiencies in security force capabilities and in the rule of law made it difficult for the justice system to investigate or address violations. Furthermore, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) did not operate at full capability during the reporting period and were unable to prevent or remedy violations of these rights.

Although the Constitution generally provided for full religious freedom, it was heavily focused on the nation's Islamic identity. Article 2, which recognizes Islam as the country's official religion, mandates that Islam be considered a source of legislation and that no law be enacted which contradicts the faith's universally agreed tenets. On June 14, 2006, the Council of Representatives implemented bylaws requiring that a verse from the Qur'an be read before each session.

The second clause of Article 2, however, stipulates that no law be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy, or basic freedoms, which include the right 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.

Many Muslim holy days are also national holidays, including, Ashura, Arbai'n, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Although some non-Muslim holy days are recognized, such as Christmas, only Muslim holy days are officially recognized as national holidays.

Non-Muslims complained that although the Government recognizes their religious holidays by law, in practice they were generally disregarded. Schools routinely scheduled examinations during non-Muslim holy days, and no special dispensation was given to students wishing to observe them.

Religious groups are required to register with the Government. According to the Christian and Other Religions Endowment, approximately twenty foreign missionaries have applied to operate in the country since 2003; however, only ten remain

in the country. After learning of the registration requirements, which include having at least 500 followers, none of the organizations returned to complete the registration process.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools. In most areas of the country, students in both primary and secondary school must study Islam for approximately three hours daily as a requirement for graduation. Religious study is not mandatory in the north. Non-Muslim students are not required to participate in Islamic studies; however, some non-Muslim students reported that they felt pressure to do so. Alternative religious study is provided for in the curriculum of non-Muslim schools.

Under civil law there is no penalty for conversion. Under Islamic law, conversion from Islam to another religion is a criminal offense subject to the death penalty. 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. Both are still part of the law.

Provisions in the TAL and the Constitution provide for religious freedom. However, at the end of the reporting period, the Ministry of Interior's Nationality and Passport Section continued to follow the provisions of Regulation 358 of 1975 which prohibits the issuance of a nationality identity card to those claiming the Baha'i faith. Without this official citizenship card, Baha'i experienced difficulty registering their children in school and applying for passports.

Although the Constitution, as well as the TAL before it, provides that any person who had his citizenship withdrawn shall have the right to demand its reinstatement, the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) passed a citizenship law on November 15, 2005, that, among other things, specifically precludes local Jews from regaining citizenship. The Presidency Council (the president and the two deputy presidents) sent a notice to the TNA that it was vetoing this legislation, but the TNA challenged the legal effectiveness of the notice. The law came into effect in March 2006, when it was published in the Official Gazette.

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 requires that courts apply the municipal law of the foreign litigants to resolve their domestic law matters.

Article 92 (Second) 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, the 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.

All political parties participated in the December 15, 2005, election, including the Sunni Arab parties that had boycotted the January elections. The two Sunni Arab coalitions won a total of fifty-five seats in the Council of Representatives (COR). Sunni Arabs held the positions of vice president and speaker of the COR, as well as several ministerial positions.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on religious beliefs, or interpretations of religious doctrine. Although the political coalitions competing in the December elections were based predominantly on religion or ethnicity, religious belief or ethnicity was not a requirement for participation in all

cases. For example, the Kurdish List, which won 21 percent of the seats in the COR, included Sunnis, Shi'a, Christians, and Yazidi; the Iraqiyun List also included a variety of ethnicities and religious groups. Likewise, the winning Shi'a Coalition, although predominantly Shi'a Islamists, also included religious and ethnic minorities, such as Sunnis, Yazidi, Kurds, Turkmen, and Shabak. The United Iraqi Alliance also included secular Shi'a and political independents not associated with any religious party.

Although the transitional government publicly supported the freedom of all individuals to worship as they chose, there were some reports of discrimination by Shi'a elements in the Government against Sunni and non-Muslim minorities. The Wahhabi branch of Islam and the Baha'i faith are prohibited by law; however, the respective provisions of the TAL and provisions within the Constitution on freedom of religion may supercede these laws. Nonetheless, by the end of the reporting period, no court had ruled on these laws as no challenges had been brought.

The Personal Status Law of Foreigners requires that courts apply the municipal law of the foreign litigants to resolve their domestic law matters. Despite this exception in the 1959 Personal Status Law, there are instances in which this law, based on Shari'a principles, applies to non-Muslims, thereby overriding rules particular to their religion. For instance, the law forbids the marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim; also, in the distribution of inheritance, a female receives one-half of what a male receives. 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.

Many residents on the Ninewah Plain, who are mostly non-Muslim, were better able to participate in the October 2005 Constitutional referendum and December 2005 national election. Although the Chaldean and Assyrian Christian communities were anticipating barriers to voting—similar to those in January 2005—there were few documented cases of voter intimidation according to the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI).

Passports do not indicate an individual's religion; however, religion is explicitly noted on the national identity card.

Government employees were not prohibited from displaying elements of their religion.

Students generally were not prohibited from practicing elements of their faith in school; however, during the reporting period, non-Muslim minorities and secular Arabs in some schools were increasingly forced, often under the threat of violence, to adhere to conservative Islamic practices. During the reporting period, Basrah's education director instituted a policy requiring all females in the schools to cover their heads and all female university students in Mosul, even non-Muslims, were required to wear the hijab, or headscarf.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government does not officially 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 issues relating to abuses of freedom of religion.

Many attributed the escalating 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 attempting to sow sectarian strife. Sectarian attacks and reprisals following the Samarra bombing, were estimated to have claimed more than one thousand lives and damaged more than sixty mosques across the country. 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 Sunni Arab community often cited police raids of its mosques and religious sites as an example of targeting by the Shi'a-dominated government.

On May 19, 2005, for example, security forces raided Baghdad's prominent Sunni Abu Hanifa Mosque as Friday prayers were ending, reportedly to detain alleged terrorists. Local leaders complained that security forces used tear gas and abused women. The prime minister subsequently provided compensation for damages to the Sunni religious endowment office and promised a full investigation of the incident.

On June 9, 2005, police broke into Amarra's Sunni Hetteen Mosque in the south charging that it harbored terrorists. Subsequently, the police turned the mosque over to the Shi'a Endowment Office, which changed its name to Fatima Al Zahraa Mosque.

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. Assyrian Christians also alleged that the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)-dominated judiciary routinely discriminated against non-Muslims and failed to enforce judgments in their favor. Despite the allegations of KRG discrimination against religious minorities, many non-Muslims fled north from the more volatile areas in the middle and southern parts of the country where pressures to conform publicly to narrow interpretations of Islamic teaching were greater.

Sunni Arab leaders accused the Badr Organization, an armed militia of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and the Jaysh al-Mehdi Shi'a militia, of assassinating Sunni clerics. The Badr Organization group claimed it had relinquished its weaponry and become a strictly political organization. However, by the end of the reporting period, reports of Jaysh al-Mehdi militia attacks on Sunni residents and places of worship were increasing.

The Armenian Church of Iraq was working 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. Church officials stated that discussions with the Government yielded no results during the reporting period; however, they were optimistic about the KRG's return of property in the north.

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. However, there were reports that Islamic extremists threatened, kidnapped, and killed Mandaeans for refusing to convert to Islam.

Abuses 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 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, assaulted with acid, and killed for refusing to wear the hijab or for dressing in western-style clothing. On August 5, 2005, Assyrian college student Anita Tyadors was killed in the Zohoor region of Mosul. She was reportedly targeted for her modern lifestyle, including speaking English and wearing Western clothing. Some women claimed they were denied employment and educational opportunities because they were non-Muslim, did not dress in accordance with conservative Islamic norms, or did not sufficiently adhere to strict interpretations of religious rules governing public behavior.

On March 15, 2005, Muqtada al-Sadr loyalists attacked picnicking Basrah University students, claiming they were violating the principles of Islam with their western-style clothing, and by singing, and dancing. The Sadrists fired guns at the students and beat them with sticks. Police were present during the incident but did not intervene. University officials reported that at least fifteen students were hospitalized, many with serious injuries. One student reportedly died in the incident.

Islamist militants harassed shopkeepers for providing goods or services they considered to be inconsistent with Islam and sometimes killed them for failing to comply with warnings to stop such activity. Liquor storeowners, primarily Christians and Yazidi, were especially targeted. Liquor stores in Baghdad, Mosul, and Basrah were bombed, looted, and defaced. More than fifty liquor stores operated by Assyrians in Baghdad were closed during the reporting period due to threats by Islamic extremists.

The Christian and Other Religions Endowment reported that, after a series of church bombings and incidents of violence targeting Christians over the past two years, more than 200,000 non-Muslims left the country or fled to the North. Many remained in Jordan or Syria awaiting improvement in the security situation.

A succession of car bombs on January 29, 2006, targeted Christian churches in Baghdad and Mosul. Attacks on the Catholic Church of the Virgin Mary and the Orthodox Church in Kirkuk, and Saint Joseph's Catholic Church and an Anglican Church in Baghdad killed at least three persons and injured nine. The same day, a car bomb also exploded outside the residence of the Apostolic Nuncio (also referred to as the Vatican Embassy).

Christian leaders inside and outside of the country reported that members of their Baghdad community received threat letters demanding that Christians leave or be

killed. Thousands of Christians reportedly left their neighborhoods to live with family either in other neighborhoods, or outside of Baghdad.

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. More than 100,000 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.

During the reporting period, Sabean leaders reported that their community was increasingly targeted. In the spring of 2006, Sabeans began to receive death threat letters accusing them of practicing sorcery and urging them to leave the country. According to estimates, more than ten Sabaeans were killed and ten to fifteen Sabaeans were kidnapped for ransom during the reporting period. There were also reports that Islamic extremists threatened, kidnapped, and killed Sabaeans for refusing to convert to Islam.

The Yazidi community reported that eleven Yazidis were killed during the reporting period, including Ninewa Provincial Council member Hasan Nermo, who was assassinated on April 20, 2006.

In addition to targeting non-Muslims, terrorists continued to attack both Sunni and Shi'a communities during the reporting period. Insurgents attacked mosques in Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods and killed clerics, other religious leaders, and private citizens of both sects. There were also accusations that both insurgents and militia wore police uniforms to incite sectarian violence and discredit the Government in the eyes of the public.

On July 16, 2005, a suicide bomber killed more than ninety-eight people and injured more than 130 in a suicide attack in front of a Shi'a mosque in Musayyab. The explosion occurred as worshipers were emerging from evening prayers. The same mosque was also targeted in a suicide attack on November 2, 2006, which killed at least twenty persons. In that attack, a bomber exploded on a minibus in front of the mosque as persons were arriving for sunset prayers.

On September 14, 2005, Baghdad was hit by at least a dozen attacks that appeared to target Shi'a civilians. Violence continued two days later, with an attack on a Shi'a mosque in Tuz Khurmatu in Salah ad Din province that killed fourteen, and assassinations of Shi'a clerics in Mosul and the Sadr City neighborhood of Baghdad. In an internet posting, Al Qaeda in Iraq claimed responsibility for the series of attacks and declared an "all out war" on Shi'a in the country.

On October 5, 2005, a bomb planted in the doorway of a Shi'a mosque in Hilla killed at least twenty-five and injured more than eighty-seven. The bomb at the Ibn al-Nama mosque exploded as worshippers gathered for prayers on the first day of Ramadan.

On November 18, suicide bombers struck two Shi'a mosques in the town of Khanaqin, near the Iranian border. More than ninety persons were killed in the midday attacks, as worshippers gathered for Friday prayers. Both the Greater and Smaller Khanaqin mosques were destroyed in the attacks.

The February 22, 2006, bombing of the Askariya Shrine in Samarra led to an increase in sectarian violence. Those who attacked the Golden Mosque sought to exploit divisions among the population and the political leadership. The Government and religious leaders alike, in a demonstration of national unity, condemned the attacks and called for an end to sectarian unrest. Many families fled mixed neighborhoods for fear of attack, and estimates indicated that between 50,000 and 80,000 persons were internally displaced. Although the majority of the displaced were Shi'a, almost 25 percent of the families were Sunni. Reports also indicated that as many as one thousand Christians were also displaced due to threats and intimidation.

On March 24, 2006, a bomb planted outside a Sunni mosque in the town of Khalis killed five persons and injured seventeen others. The explosion at the Sunni Saad Bin Abi Waqqas mosque occurred as worshippers were leaving from Friday prayers.

On April 6, 2006, a car bomb exploded approximately 300 meters from the Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf. At least thirteen persons were killed in the attack against the most revered holy site for Shi'a Muslims in the country.

On April 7, 2006, three suicide bombers attacked a Shi'a mosque in Baghdad, killing at least seventy-nine persons. The attack on the Baratha mosque, which is affiliated with the largest Shi'a political party, occurred as Friday prayers were ending. Two of the bombers detonated in the crowded courtyard, while the third exploded at the main exit. The Baratha mosque was again attacked on June 16, 2006.

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, significant

improvements were made with respect for religious freedom during the reporting period.

While the Sunni minority did not broadly participate in the January elections, resulting in only nominal representation in the TNA, the transitional government made some efforts to encourage Sunni participation in the political and Constitutional development processes. Members of all minority and religious groups participated in the October Constitutional referendum, approving a Constitution that protects the rights of all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation. Although there was some initial concern from minority leaders, especially Christians, about the extensive role of Islam in the Constitution, the Government has reached out to these leaders to assure them that their rights as minorities are protected. During the transitional government administration, both President Talabani and Prime Minister Jafari met with Chaldean (Catholic) Patriarch Emmanuel III Delly in September 2005 to discuss Constitutional concerns. Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari met with Pope Benedict XVI in Rome on August 26, 2005, to discuss religious freedom and legal rights for Christians in the country. Zebari attended a Catholic Church sponsored conference in Italy. Later, in November 2005, President Talabani also discussed religious freedom with the Pope.

Despite violence against Christian communities, fifteen new evangelical Christian congregations have reportedly been established in Baghdad since April 2003. Under the previous regime, only two evangelical churches—both Presbyterian and led by Egyptian nationals—were allowed to exist. At the end of the period covered by this report, Baptists, Methodists, and other Christian congregations emerged, all led by local clergy.

During the reporting period, Government leaders repeatedly 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. Former Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari frequently expressed his concern over implications of Government involvement in violence against the Sunni Arab minority. By the end of the reporting period, no information regarding investigations into alleged ISF abuses or punishment of perpetrators had been released to the public. The Government also made clear it would not exempt mosques and homes of religious leaders from assault if they were being used as insurgent strongholds.

The Government publicly denounced all incidents of sectarian violence and, as such violence escalated in late February, repeatedly encouraged unity among the county's religious sects. Both President Jalal Talabani and former Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari immediately condemned the bombing of the Askariya Shrine in Samarra and called for calm as sectarian tensions flared.

Religious leaders reported that they generally had good relations and worked together to promote interfaith understanding. The Sabeans sought the assistance of the Grand Ayatollah Sistani, SCIRI's Hakim, Prime Minister Jafari, and Muqtada al-Sadr in supporting minority rights.

Religious leaders of all 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.

After the Samarra bombing, Sunni and Shi'a religious leaders in cities across the country joined together for joint prayer services in protest of sectarian violence. In early March 2006, representatives of the Sunni Muslims Scholars Association visited Grand Ayatollah Al Sistani and the Marjaiya, or the Shi'a supreme religious authorities, in Najaf to discuss ways to calm the sectarian violence and unite the population.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The country's cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity is far better reflected in its political and economic structure than prior to the 2003 liberation. Shi'a Arabs, the religious majority of the population, were long disadvantaged economically, politically, and socially but now constitute the majority in the Government.

Despite these changes, conservative and extremist Islamic elements continued to exert tremendous pressure on society to conform to their interpretations of Islam's precepts. Although this impacted both the Sunni and Shi'a secular Muslim population, non-Muslims were especially vulnerable to the pressure and violence because of their minority status and the lack of protection provided by a tribal structure.

Sunni Muslims claimed general discrimination, alleging revenge by the Shi'a majority for the Sunnis' presumed favored status under the former regime, but also because of the public's perception that the insurgency was composed primarily of Sunni extremists and former regime elements with whom the majority of the Sunni

population supposedly sympathized. While some within the Sunni community supported and even assisted the insurgency, many denounced the terrorism as vocally as their non-Sunni counterparts.

Non-Muslims, particularly Christians, complained of being isolated by the Muslim majority because of their religious differences. Despite their statistically proportional representation in the National Assembly, many non-Muslims said they were disenfranchised and their interests not adequately represented.

The combination of discriminatory hiring practices, attacks against non-Muslim businesses, and the overall lack of rule of law, have also had a detrimental economic impact on the non-Muslim community and contributed to the significant numbers of non-Muslims who left the country. The Armenian Diocese estimated that the number of destitute Armenian Christians, for example, had grown by 50 percent since 2003, a condition exacerbated by the inadequate security environment, which hampers Armenian Christians' ability to find employment. Terrorist threats have compelled tens of thousands of Christians, including Armenian Orthodox and Chaldean Catholics, to leave the country in the wake of church bombings in 2004 and early 2006.

Terrorist threats also caused thousands of Sunni and Shi'a to leave their homes and flee to more tolerant neighborhoods or leave the country altogether. The magnitude of sectarian attacks on both Sunnis and Shi'a was extremely high, albeit difficult to track.

Anti-Semitic feeling remained a strong undercurrent during the reporting year. According to the head of the Christian and Other Religions Endowment, the country's 2,700-year-old Jewish population had dwindled to less than fifteen persons in the Baghdad area.

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 Embassy also facilitated interfaith discussion by hosting meetings, roundtables, and other events with all member religious groups of the country's diverse religious communities and funded training, seminars, conferences, and exchange programs to promote religious understanding and tolerance.

The Embassy's primary focus during the reporting period was on reducing sectarian violence, increasing Sunni and non-Muslim inclusion in the political and Constitutional development processes, and increasing interfaith understanding. The United States worked to increase Sunni inclusion in the political process by providing technical assistance to Sunni leaders. U.S.-funded projects worked with religious minorities by bringing together members of different religious and ethnic backgrounds to discuss common problems. The United States also conducted a significant amount of conflict mitigation at the local level through its Community Action Program (CAP). Under the CAP, community groups were formed with diverse membership, including women and youth, in an effort to promote reconciliation. In ethnically or religiously mixed communities, these community groups included representatives from all segments of society. These groups identified and prioritized their needs and developed projects to address those needs. The projects did not specifically target any one ethnic or religious group for assistance. Rather, they sought opportunities to bridge differences.

The Iraqi Institute of Peace (IIP), an interfaith dialogue center established with financial and organizational support from the U.S Institute of Peace, continued to focus on mitigating conflict and building peace primarily through its forum work. IIP forums target specific groups such as women, youth, and the media, and focus on key topics such as human rights and religious dialogue.

IIP forums have promoted tolerance and peace through democracy building. They played a critical role in the drafting of the Constitution by educating the public about the process and made a concerted effort to encourage Sunnis, who had boycotted the January 2005 elections, to participate in the process. Conferences and forums educating citizens about the Constitutional referendum and the national election were also held.

In addition to promoting peace through democratic reform, IIP regularly meets with tribal leaders, senior clerics and community leaders in tension-filled areas to improve dialogue and mitigate conflict. IIP, along with a network of affiliated NGOs, also organized Brotherhood Day events during Ramadan in assorted cities. These

events were attended by clerics of different religious sects, tribal sheiks, and other notables who held common prayers and signed declarations of brotherhood.

ISRAEL[1]

The country has no Constitution; however, the law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respects this right.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, problems continued to exist, stemming primarily from the unequal treatment of religious minorities, and from the state's recognition of only Orthodox Jewish religious authorities in personal and some civil status matters concerning Jews.

Relations among religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, Muslims and Christians, secular and religious Jews, and among the different streams of Judaism—often were strained. Tensions between Israeli Jews and Arabs increased significantly after the start of the second Intifada (or uprising) in 2000 when the police killed twelve Israeli-Arab demonstrators, prompting a three-year public inquiry and investigation. The Orr Commission of Inquiry established to investigate the killings found certain police officers guilty of wrongdoing, and concluded in 2003 that the "government's handling of the Arab sector has been primarily neglectful and discriminatory," that it "did not show sufficient sensitivity to the needs of the Arab population, and did not take enough action to allocate state resources in an equal manner." The Police Investigation Department (PID) decided in September 2005 not to indict any police officers for the killings. The Government then announced that the Deputy State Attorney would review the PID decision, and has allowed Adalah, an Arab-Israeli advocacy group, to examine the investigation files so that the organization could prepare a summary of its findings for the Deputy State Attorney. Tensions remained high due to institutional, legal, and societal discrimination against the country's Arab 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 approximately 7,685 square miles, and its population is approximately 7 million, of which 5.6 million are Jews (including Jewish settlers who live in the Occupied Territories), approximately 1.3 million are Arabs, and approximately 290,000 are members of other minorities. Although the Government defined nearly 80 percent of the population as Jewish, approximately 306,000 of these citizens 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 were Haredim, or ultra-Orthodox, and another 9 percent were Orthodox, while 39 percent described themselves as "traditionally observant" or "traditional," and 44 percent described themselves as "secular" Jews, most of whom observed some Jewish traditions. A growing but still small number of traditional and secular Jews associated 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.

Numerous religious groups are represented in the country. Slightly less than twenty percent of the population is non-Jewish and the vast majority of them are ethnically Arab. Of this number, Muslims constitute approximately twelve percent, Christians 3.5 percent, Druze 1.5 percent, and adherents of other religious approximately 0.5 percent. The non-Jewish populations were concentrated in the north, in Bedouin communities in the Negev region in the south, and in the narrow band of Arab villages in the central part of the country adjacent to the Occupied Territories. Relatively small communities of evangelical Christians, Messianic Jews (those who consider themselves Jewish but believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah), and Jehovah's Witnesses also resided throughout the country. In an April 2005,' media re-

[1] The religious freedom situation in the Occupied Territories is discussed in the annex appended to this report.

port, a leader of the Jewish Messianic community estimated that the Messianic Jewish population numbers approximately 10,000 persons. Media sources also indicated that the number of Messianic Jews had grown rapidly over the past decade, with many new adherents coming from the Russian immigrant community.

The Government reported that approximately 60,000 to 70,000 legal foreign workers lived in the country, and estimated that another 50,000 to 70,000 illegal foreign workers resided in the country. Two local non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for workers' rights placed the number of legal foreign workers closer to 100,000, and estimated that another approximately 100,000 illegal foreign workers lived in the country. Most of the foreign workers were 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 law provides for freedom of worship, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The declaration of independence describes the country as a "Jewish state," but provides for full social and political equality regardless of religious affiliation. While the law explicitly guarantees freedom of religion and the safeguarding of "holy places of all religions," inequities exist. Israeli-Arabs and other non-Jews generally were free to practice their religions; however, discrepancies in treatment existed between Jews and various non-Jewish communities, and between Orthodox Jews and Jews of non-Orthodox affiliations.

The "status quo" agreement reached at the founding of the state, which has been upheld throughout the state's history, guarantees the Government will implement certain policies based on Orthodox Jewish interpretations of religious law. For example, the Government does not recognize Jewish marriages performed in the country unless they are performed by the Orthodox Jewish establishment. The Orthodox Jewish establishment also determines who is buried in Jewish state cemeteries, limiting this right to individuals considered "Jewish" by the Orthodox standards. In addition, the national airline El Al and public buses in 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. According to the Israel Religious Action Center (IRAC), however, the Government often chooses not to enforce the law.

In April 2004, the High Court rejected a petition demanding that the Ministry of the Interior enforce the prohibition on the public display of leavened products for sale during the Passover holiday, but it did not rule on the legality of the prohibition. Then, in March 2005, following the interior minister's announcement that he would not enforce the prohibition, then-Prime Minister Sharon reportedly instructed the minister to enforce the prohibition. In recent practice, however, the Government has not enforced this law, according to IRAC. There were no reports of its enforcement during the reporting period. In regions inhabited primarily by non-Jews, bread was displayed and sold openly during Passover.

In 2003, the High Court suspended several municipal prohibitions and curbs on the sale of pork and instructed municipalities to allow sales of pork in neighborhoods where no more than an unspecified, small portion of the residents would object on religious grounds. The result of the decision was to allow each municipality to determine on its own whether to allow the sale of pork.

The law recognizes as "religious communities" those recognized by and carried over from the British Mandate period (1920–1946), 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 (Uniate), Greek Catholic Melkite, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, and Jewish. Since the founding of the country, the Government has recognized three additional religious communities—the Druze (a monotheistic offshoot of Islam) in 1957, the Evangelical Episcopal Church in 1970, and the Baha'i in 1971. The status of several Christian denominations with representation in the country has been defined by a collection of ad hoc arrangements with various Government agencies. The

fact that the Muslim population was not defined as a religious community was a vestige of the Ottoman period, where Islam was the dominant religion, and it does not limit Muslims from practicing their faith. The Government allows members of unrecognized religions 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. In addition, unlike recognized religious communities, unrecognized religious communities do not receive government funding for their religious services. The Arrangements Law provides exemption from municipal taxes for any place of worship of a recognized faith. Exemption from tax payments is also granted to churches that have not been officially recognized by law. In several cases, the Government has interpreted that exemption from municipal taxes to apply only to that portion of the property of religious organizations that was actually used for religious worship. Not-for-profit religious schools also receive tax exemptions. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) had tax-exemption status for its hospital on the Mount of Olives for more than thirty years until the District Court revoked this privilege in 2002. After several rescheduled hearings, the Supreme Court was scheduled to hear LWF's case for tax exemption on May 22, 2006.

Secular courts have primacy over questions of inheritance, but parties, by mutual agreement, may bring such cases to religious courts. Jewish and Druze families may ask for some family status matters, such as alimony and child custody in divorces, to be adjudicated in civil courts as an alternative to religious courts. Christians may ask that child custody and child support cases be adjudicated in civil courts rather than in religious courts. Muslims have the right to bring matters such as alimony and property division associated with divorce cases to civil courts in family-status matters. However, paternity cases remain under the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts. There is no overarching law or directive that prescribes these varying approaches.

The Supreme Court ruled in April 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 courts playing this role. Although the rabbinic courts have ruled on financial matters since before the establishment of the state, their jurisdiction 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 to the Justice Ministry for its consideration. In March 2004, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was officially dismantled and its 300 employees were reassigned to several other ministries. As a result, the Ministry of the Interior now has jurisdiction over religious matters concerning non-Jewish groups; the Ministry of Tourism is responsible for the protection and upkeep of all holy sites, and the Prime Minister's office has jurisdiction over the nation's 133 religious councils (one Druze and the rest Jewish) that oversee the provision of religious services to their respective communities. Legislation establishing religious councils does not include non-Jewish religious communities other than the Druze. Instead, the Ministry of the Interior directly funds religious services for recognized non-Jewish communities. The state, through the Prime Minister's office, continues to finance approximately 40 percent of the religious councils' budgets, and local authorities fund the remainder. According to government figures, the 2005 state budget included approximately $31.5 million (Shekels (NIS) 140,000,000) for religious councils.

According to government budget figures, during 2005 the budget for religious services and religious structures for the Jewish population totaled approximately $260 million (NIS 1.19 billion). Religious minorities, which comprised approximately 20 percent of the population, received approximately $13 million (NIS 61 million), or 5 percent of total funding. Of these totals, the Government reported that the 2005 budget for Jewish religious services was approximately $55.5 million (NIS 250,000,000). The 2005 religious services budget for the non-Jewish communities, including the Druze, totaled approximately $6.5 million (NIS 29,250,000). At least $209 million (NIS 960 million), comprising approximately 80 percent of the budget for Jewish religious services and education, went toward Orthodox services, Orthodox rabbis' salaries, and Orthodox educational institutions.

Arab advocacy groups continued to charge that the state did not allocate adequate or proportional funds for the provision of religious services in Arab towns and vil-

lages. A reputable representative of the Arab Christian community criticized the Government in April 2005 for not allocating enough funds for Christian institutions. The Government claimed, however, that funding for religious services in Arab communities has been proportional to the percentage of the total population that these communities comprise. The Government did not provide evidence to support its claim.

Under the Law of Return, the Government grants immigration and residence rights to individuals who meet established criteria defining Jewish identity. Included in this definition is a child or grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew, and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew. A separate, more rigorous standard based on Orthodox Jewish criteria is used to determine the right to full citizenship, entitlement to government financial support for immigrants, the legitimacy of conversions to Judaism performed within the country, and Jewish status for purposes of personal and some civil status 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 does not apply to non-Jews or to persons of Jewish descent who have converted to another faith. Approximately 36 percent of the country's Jewish population was born outside of the country.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) charged that the Ministry of the Interior's Population Registry subjected non-Jewish spouses and non-Jewish adopted children of Jewish immigrants to unfair and at times arbitrary policies for proving the bona fides of their relationship for residency purposes. Most of these cases involved persons who immigrated under the Law of Return from the former Soviet republics and their non-Jewish spouses and non-Jewish adopted children. In August 2004, the minister of the interior acknowledged the problems and took steps to change certain policies. For example, in August 2004, the minister of interior announced that he was canceling his ministry's requirement that immigrants from the former Soviet republics deposit a $7,000 (30,000-shekel) bank guarantee before allowing their non-Jewish spouses to enter the country. The deposit was to be returned once the spouse was granted residency.

In 2003, the Government began issuing new and replacement identification cards that do not carry a "nationality" (i.e., usually religious) designation. Citizens and residents are still required to register with the Ministry of the Interior's Population Registry as one of a set list of nationalities. Immediately prior to this reporting period, the Ministry of the Interior issued to individuals arriving in the country immigration forms with an item for travelers to list their religion. Immigration officials were inconsistent in seeking compliance, and the form has since been amended to omit any questions on religious affiliation.

Politicians, media outlets, and many ordinary citizens criticized the Government's practice of granting military draft exemptions and living allowances to full-time yeshiva students. Under the Tal Law, ultra-Orthodox Jews are entitled to exemption from military service to pursue religious studies. This exemption allows ultra-Orthodox Jews to postpone military service in one-year increments to pursue full-time religious studies at recognized yeshivas, or religious schools. These students must renew their deferments each year by proving that they are full-time students. At the age of twenty-two, the yeshiva students are given one year to decide whether to continue to study full time with yearly renewals until they reach the age of forty; to perform community service for one year, and thereafter, twenty-one days each year until the age of forty; or to serve in the army until they finish their military service requirement. According to the Government, approximately 9 percent of all male candidates for military service have deferments as full-time yeshiva students, up from 7.3 percent in 2000.

In July 2005, the justice minister wrote to the prime minister to report that the Tal Law had been implemented "unsatisfactorily, to say the least," and insisted that "an immediate change to the situation is needed." In the three years since the law took effect, between 2002 and 2005, only about 1,100 of the 14,000 yeshiva students with draft deferrals had elected to take a "year of decision," and of those students, only about 30 had actually chosen to perform army service. Only 139 out of 45,639 ultra-Orthodox Jews at the military-conscription age have joined the army since 2002. Officials in both the IDF and the Finance Ministry reportedly opposed the Tal Law for various reasons, and failed to implement it. The only two national service programs designed specifically for the ultra-Orthodox include the Nahal Haredi Unit and the Haredi soldier-teacher program. The Government did not take steps to implement the law or to create new military service options for ultra-Orthodox Jews during the reporting period.

Public Hebrew-speaking secular schools teach mandatory Bible and Jewish history classes. These classes primarily cover Jewish heritage and culture, rather than

religious belief. Public schools with predominantly Arab student bodies teach mandatory classes on the Qur'an and the Bible, since both Muslim and Christian Arabs attend these schools. Orthodox Jewish religious schools that are part of the public school system teach mandatory religion classes, as do private ultra-Orthodox schools that receive some state funding.

The Government recognizes the following Jewish holy days as national holidays: Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Simhat Torah, Passover, and Shavuot. Arab municipalities often recognize Christian and Muslim holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Muslim, Christian, and Orthodox Jewish religious authorities have exclusive control over personal status matters, including marriage, divorce, and burial, within their respective communities. The law does not allow civil marriage, and it does not recognize Jewish marriage performed in the country unless by recognized Orthodox rabbis. Many Jewish citizens objected to such exclusive control by the Orthodox establishment over Jewish marriages and other personal status problems, and to the absence of provision for civil marriage, because approximately 306,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union were not recognized as Jewish by Orthodox authorities.

The 1967 Protection of Holy Sites Law applies to holy sites of all religions within the country, and the Penal Code makes it a criminal offense to damage any holy site. The Government, however, issued implementing regulations for only Jewish sites. The Government reported in 2006 that there were several hundred official holy sites in 2005—including ten new mosques that were still under construction during the reporting period—without specifying the number of these sites that the law protects. In 2006, the Government did not issue new implementing regulations to protect non-Jewish holy sites under the law, including the ten new mosques under construction.

In November 2004, the Arab Israeli advocacy group Adalah petitioned the High Court to compel the Government to issue regulations to protect Muslim sites, charging that the Government's failure to do so had resulted in desecration and the conversion of several sites into commercial establishments. In its petition, Adalah stated that all of the 120 places designated by the Government as holy sites are Jewish. At the end of the reporting period, the court had not held an initial hearing on the petition. The Government established a committee to examine the issue, but the committee has met only once, according to Adalah. The Government is expected to submit its full response to the petition prior to the initial hearing, scheduled for October 2006. According to Adalah, the Government did not designate any non-Jewish sites as holy sites in either 2005 or 2006, while it has added fifteen Jewish sites since December 2004. The Government did not provide statistics on holy sites.

In December 2004, the Arab Association for Human Rights (AAHR) issued a comprehensive report documenting what it refers to as the "destruction and abuse of Muslim and Christian holy places in Israel." In its report, AAHR asserted that 250 non-Jewish places of worship had either been destroyed during and after the 1948 war or made inaccessible to the local Arab population. Lands of destroyed Arab villages were given to Jewish farmers, and the surviving mosques in these villages had been used as animal pens or storage depots. In Ein Hod, a town south of Haifa, the mosque was turned into a bar. The Government stated that in March 2004, there was a fire in an abandoned mosque in Beit She'an, resulting in a collapse of the structure. The Government reported that the only incident involving damage to a holy site in 2005 occurred in early March, when a couple protesting a family court decision lit firecrackers in the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth, sparking a riot among church members.

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 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.

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, among other places, Tiberias, Safed, Beersheva, and Caesaria; the Government kept several of these mosques closed during the year, reportedly for the mosques' protection, and 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 cited examples of mosques that received government assistance for their maintenance in 2004, including mosques in Romana, Bartaa, Baana, Daburiya, Bir al Maksur, Bustan Almarge, Maala Iron, Hualad, and Hura, which altogether received approximately $313,000 (NIS 1,420,000). The Government's total development budget for cemeteries was approximately $6.75 million (NIS 30 million) in 2005. According to government figures, the development budget in 2005 for holy sites and cemeteries for non-Jewish denominations was $2.22 million (NIS 10 million).

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 January 2005, the High Court issued an interim opinion suggesting that the mosque be used as an Islamic cultural and social center by the Muslim community of Be'er Sheva, but not for prayer. In February 2005, the municipality issued a response rejecting this suggestion, insisting that the mosque be opened as a museum. According to Adalah, the attorney general originally submitted a response to the High Court supporting the Be'er Sheva Municipality's position that the building not be used as an Islamic Cultural Center, but in April 2006 the attorney general announced that the Government preferred to reopen the mosque as a museum for Islamic and eastern culture. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

Building codes for places of worship are enforced selectively based on religion. Several Bedouin living in unrecognized villages were denied building permits for construction of mosques, and in the past, the Government has destroyed mosques built in unrecognized Bedouin communities. In 2003, government officials demolished a mosque that was constructed without a permit and served approximately 1,500 residents in the unrecognized Bedouin village of Tel al-Maleh. According to the Regional Council for the Arab Unrecognized Villages in the Negev, in 2003 and 2004, the Government issued demolition orders for three mosques in Um al-Hiran, al-Dhiyya, and Tel al-Maleh respectively; all three were unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev and built without the proper permits. The Regional Planning and Building Committee in the Negev stated that it was unaware that the building marked for demolition in al-Dhiyya was a mosque. By the end of the reporting period, the demolition orders continued to stand. The Tel al-Maleh case was transferred to a lower court for review and the case was pending at the end of the rating period. In 2003 in Um al-Hiran, the Government issued orders to demolish the mosque, and villagers were fined approximately $7,000 (NIS 30,000) for building the structure without a permit. Earlier this year, following a failed appeal by the village, the Magistrate' Court ordered the mosque to be destroyed. It was not known at the end of the period covered by this report whether the mosque was demolished.

Adalah reported that, in March 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. In contrast, according to a former Tel Aviv municipal council member, in recent years approximately 100 illegal synagogues have operated in Tel Aviv, some within apartment buildings and others in separate structures.

A 1977 anti-proselytizing law prohibits any person from offering or receiving material benefits as an inducement to conversion. No reports existed of attempts to enforce the law during the reporting period.

Missionaries are allowed to proselytize, although the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) voluntarily refrained from proselytizing under a signed agreement with the Government.

By the end of the period covered by this report, the Knesset had not ratified the Fundamental Agreement establishing relations between the Holy See and the Gov-

ernment that was negotiated in the 1990s. In a separate process, representatives of the Government and the Holy See held several negotiating sessions since September 2004 with the aim of reaching an agreement (concordat) on fiscal and legal matters. The negotiations addressed the problems of tax exemption of Roman Catholic institutions and property and the access of the Roman Catholic Church to courts. No agreement had been reached by the end of the period covered by this report.

Since the Government does not have diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Muslim citizens must travel through another country, usually Jordan, to obtain travel documents for the Hajj. The average number of Hajj pilgrims traveling from the country each year 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 religions traveled to the country freely. Members of the Messianic Jewish community, however, charged that during the year, government officials detained and denied entry to several of their members who were seeking to enter the country. There were no new instances during the reporting period.

According to representatives of Christian institutions, the process of visa issuance for Christian religious workers significantly improved after a period in 2003 when the Government refused to grant residence visas to approximately 130 Catholic clergy assigned to the country and the Occupied Territories. The Ministry of the Interior's Christian Department reported that it approved most of the applications made by clergy during the reporting period. The Department did not stipulate how many it received.

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 twelve 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 inter-ministerial 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 National Security Council regarding chaplain appointments for non-Jewish IDF soldiers, but no decision had been made by the end of the period covered by this report.

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. In 2003, however, according to the family of a Christian soldier killed in a terrorist attack, the IDF did not have a military priest available to officiate at their son's burial. The soldier was buried in a non-Jewish section of the military cemetery in a non-religious ceremony without a religious figure to officiate. All Jewish chaplains in the IDF are Orthodox.

The IDF sponsored Orthodox Jewish conversion courses for Jewish soldiers who do not belong to Orthodox Judaism and for non-Jewish soldiers seeking to convert to Judaism. The IDF does not facilitate conversion to other religions.

Military service is compulsory for Jews and Druze. Orthodox Jews could obtain exemptions from service for full-time religious study. Some Arab citizens, mainly Bedouin, were accepted as volunteers. Approximately 90 percent of Israeli-Arabs do not serve in the army. 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 whom serve in the military. In December 2004, the Ivri Committee on National Service recommended to the Government that Israeli-Arabs be afforded an opportunity to perform alternative nonmilitary service. By the end of the reporting period, the Government had not yet considered these recommendations.

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, as were other types of schools, 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 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." It is unclear whether these institutions will continue to implement the core curriculum because Prime Minister Olmert reportedly promised the ultra-religious Shas party in April that his cabinet would pass a new law to "permit all Haredi education institutions to continue to carry out the education and study programs unique to them."

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, 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 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 lowers the schools' tuition costs.

Government funding to the different religious sectors was disproportionate to the sectors' sizes. Civil rights NGOs charged that the Government favored Orthodox Jewish institutions in the allocation of state resources for religious activities.

IRAC noted that approximately 97 percent of public funding for Jewish cultural and educational activities went to Orthodox Jewish organizations, despite IRAC's estimate that non-Orthodox Jewish institutions accounted for only approximately 20 percent of all Jewish cultural activities. In response to a petition filed by IRAC in 2002, the Supreme Court ruled in December 2004 that the Government must create new criteria for state funding of Jewish cultural activities. Accordingly, the Government issued new criteria for its funding of educational and cultural activities. The educational criteria, however, still discriminated against the secular sector, according to IRAC, which planned to petition the Supreme Court again. IRAC expressed satisfaction with the Government's new criteria for funding cultural activities, though it remained concerned that the criteria could be discriminatory in implementation.

In spite of the legal provision for public funding to build non-Orthodox synagogues, the Government did not funded the construction of any non-Orthodox synagogues. In 2003, IRAC petitioned the High Court on behalf of a Reform congregation in Modi'in to require that Modi'in municipality fund construction of a Reform synagogue. The city already funded eight Orthodox synagogues, but none of the 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 and to use criteria that would guarantee and provide 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 the Government had not allocated any such funding by the end of the reporting period.

In 1998, the High Court of Justice ruled that discrepancies in budget allocations between religious institutions in the Jewish and non-Jewish sectors constituted prima facie evidence of discrimination. In 2000 the plaintiffs from the 1998 High Court case brought a case contending discrimination in the allocation of resources

for religious cemeteries. The High Court agreed with the plaintiffs that non-Jewish religious cemeteries were receiving inadequate resources and ordered the Government to increase funding to such cemeteries.

The 1996 Alternative Burial Law established the right of any individual to be buried in a civil ceremony and required the establishment of twenty-one public civil cemeteries throughout the country. However, at the end of the reporting period, only one public civil cemetery existed in the country, in Be'er Sheva, and only approximately fifteen Jewish cemeteries in the country contained a section for civil burials. The City of Jerusalem reportedly planned to establish a cemetery for use by secular citizens free of charge. If completed, this cemetery would be the first public civil cemetery endorsed by a municipal government in the country.

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. Civil burials were also offered by certain Kibbutzim, but, according to some NGOs, such burials were expensive. The Government reported that the 2004 capital budget for civil cemeteries was approximately $760,000. It reported that in 2004, the administrative budget for Jewish cemeteries was approximately $2 million, and claimed that no capital budget was allocated. In 2005, the budget for Jewish burials was approximately (NIS 17 million), while the budget for civilian burials was (NIS 11.5 million).

Only approximately 7 percent of land was privately held, according to Adalah. Most citizens who controlled land, either for residential or business use, including farms, leased their land from the Government on long-term leases. Of the 93 percent of the land not in private hands, the Government directly controlled the vast bulk, but approximately 12.5 percent was owned by the state through the quasi-public Jewish National Fund (JNF). The Israel Land Administration, a government agency, manages both the land directly owned by the Government and the JNF land. The JNF's charter prohibited it from leasing land to non-Jews. In addition, the Jewish Agency, an organization that promotes Jewish immigration to the country and develops residential areas on both public and JNF land, as a matter of policy does not lease land to non-Jews. In 2000, the High Court ruled that the state may not allocate land to its citizens on the basis of religion or nationality, even if it allocates the land through a third party such as the Jewish Agency. The Court's decision precludes any restrictions on the leasing or sale of land based on nationality, religion, or any other discriminatory category. JNF complied with the ruling by publishing announcements about land sales in publications available to both Jews and non-Jews, but it remained unclear whether or not non-Jewish citizens would actually be able to purchase the advertised properties.

In October 2004, civil rights groups petitioned the High Court of Justice to block a government bid announcement involving JNF land that effectively banned Arabs from bidding. The Government then halted marketing of JNF land in the Galilee and other areas of the north, where there are large Arab populations. In December 2004, Adalah petitioned the High Court to require the Government to apply nondiscriminatory procedures for allocating land and to conduct open land sales or leases to Arabs as well as to Jews. In January 2005, the attorney general ruled that the Government would not discriminate against Israeli-Arabs in the marketing and allocation of lands it manages, including lands that the Israel Land Administration manages for the Jewish National Fund. Adalah criticized the attorney general, however, for also deciding that the Government should compensate the JNF with land equal in size to any plots of JNF land won by non-Jewish citizens in government tenders.

Exclusive control over marriages resides by law with recognized bodies of the recognized religious denominations. Accordingly, anyone wishing to marry in a secular ceremony, Jews wishing to marry in non-Orthodox religious ceremonies, Jews not officially recognized as Jewish by the Orthodox Jewish establishment but wishing to marry in Jewish ceremonies, and Jews wishing to marry someone of another faith must all do so abroad. The Ministry of the Interior recognizes such marriages. During the reporting period, approximately 250,000 citizens could not marry because they lacked religious affiliation. According to 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, five 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 March 2004, the Knesset (parliament) rejected two bills that would have allowed for civil marriage. In July 2004, the chairman of a Knesset committee estab-

lished 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 three months of the government's position on whether to recognize so-called "consular marriages," those conducted by officials of foreign embassies in the country. Government recognition of consular marriages would enable couples 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. According to press reports, the High Court was expected to consider two petitions demanding that the Interior Ministry recognize consular marriages in 2006.

In December 2004, the Government reached an agreement with the Chief Rabbinate to limit required prenuptial instruction to those Jewish religious laws that were directly connected to the marriage ceremony and not require Jewish couples to receive instruction on Orthodox Jewish laws of ritual purity.

The state does not recognize conversions to Judaism performed in the country by non-Orthodox rabbis. In March 2005, the High Court ruled that, for the purpose of conferring citizenship rights, the Government must recognize those non-Orthodox conversions of 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 May 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.

Separately, in May 2006 the Chief Rabbinate announced that it decided two years ago to not automatically recognize conversions performed by Orthodox rabbis abroad, citing the need for consistency of standards in the conversion process.

The Shinui Party, which ran in the 2002 national elections on a platform of ending the exclusive power of the Orthodox establishment over such problems as marriage and citizenship, left then-Prime Minister Sharon's governing coalition in December 2004 in protest over the allocation of approximately $70 million in the 2005 budget for ultra-Orthodox religious institutions. Then-Prime Minister Sharon allocated the funds as part of a coalition agreement with the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party to secure that party's support for the Gaza disengagement plan.

Under the Jewish religious courts' interpretation of personal status law, a Jewish woman may not receive a final writ of divorce without her husband's consent. Consequently, thousands of women, so-called "agunot," are unable to remarry or have legitimate children because their husbands have either disappeared or refused to grant divorces.

Rabbinical tribunals have the authority to impose sanctions on husbands who refuse to divorce their wives or on wives who refuse to accept divorce from their husbands. In May 2004, a rabbinical court decided for the first time to jail a woman who refused to accept a divorce from her husband. Rabbinical courts also could exercise jurisdiction over, and issue sanctions against, non-Israeli Jews present in the country. The rabbinical courts administration asked U.S. authorities in mid-February 2006 to extradite husbands who fled to the United States to avoid granting their wives a religious divorce decree.

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 March 2005 by awarding the woman approximately $10,000 in compensation for damage to her status and chances of remarrying. 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 fourteen-year legal battle to hold formal women's prayer services at the Western Wall. The High Court ruled that the group could not hold prayer services at the Western Wall and instead would be permitted to hold them at nearby Robinson's Arch, part of an archeological site. The court ordered the Government to prepare an area at Robinson's Arch where women could read aloud from the Bible and conduct group prayers, and the Government inaugurated a plaza in this area for women's services in August 2004. The mayor of Jerusalem, Uir Lupolianski, requested permission to expand the women's section and make its size equal to that of the men's section, by changing the route of the "Mugraby Path" leading to the Temple Mount.

Another religious group, the Masorti movement, regularly held prayer services at Robinson's Arch according to its own customs, which include dmen and women praying together, women reading from the Torah, and women wearing a tallit or tefallin. However, they could pray only between seven and eight in the morning without paying. If the members of the Masori movement wanted to pray after this time, they had to pay the approximately $6 fee charged to visit the archeological site. In April 2006, the Masorti movement petitioned the High Court regarding the fee.

Non-Orthodox Jews faced greater difficulties than Orthodox Jews in adopting children. In December 2004, in response to a petition from IRAC, the High Court ordered the Government to justify the practice under which the Adoption Service of the social affairs ministry that placed non-Jewish children only in Orthodox Jewish homes. The Government did not respond by the end of the reporting period. Existing law requires that the adopted child must be of the same religion as the adopting parents. However, Representatives of IRAC reported that when no family of the same religion was willing to adopt the child, adoption officials consistently placed the child with an Orthodox family. In such cases, the child's conversion to Judaism had to be completed before the adoption was finalized. The Government defended its practice by arguing that the placement of non-Jewish children in Orthodox homes eliminated any subsequent legal uncertainty about the Jewish status of the children. At the end of the reporting period, the case was still pending.

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 museum was reportedly considering a plan to relocate the Muslim graves.

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. citizens 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.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

During the reporting period, terrorist organizations, including Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, carried out several attacks. While terrorists launched these attacks largely as political statements, they sometimes accompanied the attacks with anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Improvements in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government appointed Oscar Abu-Razek, a Muslim Israeli-Arab, as director general of the Ministry of Interior, the first Arab to serve in such a senior position in a government ministry. In addition, for the first time since the establishment of the state, an Arab was appointed in 2004 as a permanent justice of the High Court.

According to government data, the number of non-Jewish directors on the boards of state-owned companies increased from 5.5 percent in 2002 to 8 percent in 2005. Former Prime Minister Sharon stated publicly that increasing the number of non-Jewish board directors and the number of non-Jewish civil service employees is a government priority.

Members of the Knesset and the Chief Rabbinate attended a seminar in January 2005, hosted by the American Jewish Committee, to increase understanding of the various branches of Christianity. To enhance interfaith relations, seminar participants also visited the heads of various Christian subgroups, including the Latin and Armenian patriarchs and a representative of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

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.

The Government established a new department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to fight anti-Semitism and commemorate the Holocaust.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Relations among different religious groups—between Jews and non-Jews, between Christians and Muslims, between Christians of different traditions, and among the different streams of Judaism—often 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 Arab-Israeli conflict, and manifested in terrorist attacks targeting citizens, IDF operations in the Occupied Territories, incidents of Jewish militants targeting Israeli-Arabs, and incidents of Israeli-Arab involvement in terrorist activity.

On July 7, 2005, the Messianic congregation in Arad published a letter in Iton HaTzvi that reported harassment by members of the local ultra-Orthodox community. The High Court heard on September 12, 2005, a petition by ultra-Orthodox Jews seeking both the right to demonstrate at the house of a family of Messianic Jews and reversal of a police decision prohibiting such a demonstration. The court had not issued a ruling by the end of the reporting period. According to Messianic Jews resident in Arad, since April 2004 members of the Gur Hassidim movement have demonstrated regularly in front of the homes of Christians and Messianic Jews in Arad to protest alleged proselytizing by these groups.

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 Messianic Jewish community in Arad reported suffering verbal harassment and physical violence at the hands of ultra-Orthodox Jews. During the reporting period, authorities and public officials did not respond effectively to protect this community.

According to a 2006 poll conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute, some 62 percent of the citizens believed that the Government should encourage Arab citizens to emigrate. Only 14 percent of respondents thought relations between Jews and Arabs were good in the country. An ultra-Orthodox weekly, Sh'a Tova, carried a comic strip in March 2005 for children with a negative depiction of Arabs, including the statement, "Yes, a good Arab is a dead Arab." In 2005, fans of a Jerusalem soccer team shouted racist slogans against Israeli-Arab soccer players during a match. In 2004, several Jews were indicted in one incident for shouting such slogans.

Two individuals wrapped a pig's head with a keffiyeh with the word "Mohammad" written on it and threw it into the courtyard of the Hassan Bek mosque in Jaffa on August 19, 2005. Police later arrested and charged the individuals with religious insult, but released them in September after a judge ruled that there was no risk that the individuals would repeat the act.

In March, the state prosecutor initiated a formal investigation of Rabbi David Batzri and his son, Rabbi Yitzhak Batzri, for suspected incitement to racism. The rabbis organized a conference in January to rally opposition to the proposed expansion of a bilingual school in Jerusalem that includes both Arab and Jewish students. Rabbi David Batzri stated at the conference, "The people of Israel are pure and Arabs are a nation of asses. The question must be asked, why didn't God give them four legs, because they are asses?" His son, Rabbi Yitzhak Batzri, added, "People say we are racist, but they are the evil ones, the cruel ones, the scum of snakes. This is war."

During the reporting period, incidents occurred in Jerusalem in which ultra-Orthodox Jewish youths assaulted Arabs and spray-painted anti-Arab graffiti.

During the run-up to the parliamentary elections in March, the Herut party used campaign posters depicting an Arab woman wrapped in a traditional veil with the caption "this demographic will poison us." In April Attorney General Menachem Mazuz ordered a criminal investigation into the incident.

The phrases "Death to Arabs" and "Death to Gentiles" were spray-painted in March 2005 on ten graves in a Christian cemetery in Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood. Police continued to investigate the matter, but had not made any arrests by the end of the reporting period. Adalah and AADR reported that the police have still not made any arrests. Similarly, 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.

Former Prime Minister Sharon's controversial withdrawal of all citizens from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the northern West Bank caused tensions in society between supporters and opponents of the withdrawal, the latter often being members of religious Zionist groups. Prior to disengagement, a rabbi issued a religious edict permitting settlers to physically harm Bedouin and Druze soldiers who participated in the evacuation of settlements pursuant to Sharon's plan. In response to the edict, a Bedouin Sheikh urged Bedouin soldiers to respond forcefully, including with live fire, to any settler attacks against them during the evacuation.

Death threats in various forms, including graffiti, were made against government officials who supported the disengagement plan, including against Prime Minister Sharon. During a March 2005 sermon, Shas party spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef suggested that God would see that Sharon dies for implementing disengagement. The national office of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) issued a public statement condemning Yosef's sermon for its inflammatory language and his subsequent apology as inadequate. As part of his opposition to the disengagement plan, right-wing activist Noam Federman passed out flyers inciting violence and terror and made statements on his weekly radio show such as, "Let's get rid of the Arabs. They have twenty-two other countries. Let's take them there." In March 2006, the Jerusalem prosecutor's office indicted Federman on twenty-five charges related to these actions.

In May 2006, Vandals spray painted approximately twenty swastikas on the ark, Torah scroll and walls of the great synagogue in the city of Petah Tikva. Neo-Nazi graffiti was also sprayed on monuments honoring, and actual gravesites of, several well-known historical figures, including the grave of the country's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion. In May 2005, swastikas and graffiti comparing Prime Minister Sharon to Adolf Hitler were sprayed on the road leading into the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. A reputable Jewish organization attributed these acts to extremist opponents of Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement plan. In April 2005, police discovered two fake bombs in Jerusalem and arrested two far-right Jewish religious activists for planting those bombs and others in their efforts to distract government attention from the disengagement plan.

In February 2005, Druze rioters damaged a Melkite Catholic church and damaged or burned dozens of Christian-owned businesses, homes, and cars in the northern village of Mughar after a Druze falsely claimed that Christian youths had placed pornographic pictures of Druze girls on the Internet. Eight persons were reported injured, and many Christians fled the city and refused to allow their children to return to school for weeks in the aftermath of the violence. Druze religious leaders were quick to denounce the riots, and representatives of the Christian community criticized the Government for not responding more quickly to the violence. In June 2005, the Government announced the allocation of $2 million (NIS 10 million) in state funds to compensate residents for property damage incurred during the riots.

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. Among efforts in this area were those of participants in the Alexandria Interfaith Peace Process, initiated at a 2002 interfaith conference in Cairo. Canon Andrew White, the Archbishop of Canterbury's special representative to the Alexandria Process, convened meetings in December 2004 and in January 2005 in Jerusalem with Israeli and Palestinian religious leaders to discuss advancing the Alexandria Process. The group discussed ways to advance an agenda of peace among religious leaders in their respective communities. In January 2005, as part of the Alexandria Process, Israeli rabbis and Israeli and Palestinian imams joined a group of more than 100 imams and rabbis

from all over the world in a Brussels conference aimed at enhancing interfaith understanding and combating violence.

Animosity between secular and religious Jews continued during the period covered by this report. Non-Orthodox Jews have complained of discrimination and intolerance by members of ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups. Persons who consider themselves Jewish but who are not considered Jewish under Orthodox law particularly complained of discrimination. As in past years, ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem threw rocks at passing motorists driving on the Sabbath.

A variety of NGOs 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 in the country, which promoted interfaith dialogue among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian institutions.

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. Media sources reported that the Messianic Jewish community accused Yad L'achim, a Jewish religious organization opposed to missionary activity, of harassing its members. Christian and Muslim Israeli-Arab religious leaders complain that missionary activity that leads to conversions frequently disrupts family coherence in their communities.

A March 2005 dispute over the sale of property in Jerusalem's Old City owned by the Greek Orthodox Church to Jewish investors led a Holy Synod meeting in Istanbul to depose the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Irineos I, in May 2005. While Greece, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority recognized the ousting of Irineos and the appointment of Theophilus III as his successor, the Government did not. In November 2005, Theophilus appealed this issue to the High Court and at the same time a ministerial committee was established to deal with the situation. The committee did not resolve the issue and the court recommended waiting for the establishment of the next Government and a new ministerial committee before resolving the matter.

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 representatives, including the ambassador, routinely meet with religious officials. These contacts include meetings with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze leaders at a variety of levels. In April 2005, the Embassy invited two Knesset members from the secular Shinui party and two from the ultra-Orthodox Shas party to participate together in an International Visitors Program on the U.S. legislative, judicial, and executive branches of Government. The program received positive media coverage for enhancing understanding and ties between these two rival parties.

Embassy officials maintain a dialogue with NGOs that follow human and civil rights problems, including religious freedom. Embassy representatives also attended and spoke at meetings of such organizations, including the Arab Association for Human Rights, the Mossawa Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Israel Religious Action Center, and Adalah.

The religious freedom situation in the Occupied Territories is discussed in the annex appended to this report.

THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (INCLUDING AREAS SUBJECT TO THE JURISDICTION OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY)

The Palestinian Authority (PA) does not have a ratified Constitution; however, the Palestinian Basic Law provides for freedom of religion, and the PA generally respected this right in practice. The Basic Law names Islam as the official religion but also calls for "respect and sanctity" for other religious groups.

There was no change in the status of the PA's respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Hamas candidates won 74 of 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council during elections on January 25, 2006. A new PA government led by Hamas Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah was sworn-in by PA President Mahmud Abbas on March 28. President Abbas took steps to eliminate religious incitement, although incidents of such incitement still occurred. In previous years, there were credible reports that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with criminal elements to extort property illegally from Christian landowners in the Bethlehem

area. While there were no reports of Christians being targeted for extortion or abuse during the period covered by this report, the PA did not take action to investigate past injustices allegedly perpetrated by PA officials.

Israel exercises varying degrees of legal control in the Occupied Territories. Israel has no Constitution; however, it also has a Basic Law that provides for freedom of worship. The Israeli government generally respects this right in practice in the Occupied Territories.

There was no change in the status of the Israeli government's respect for religious freedom in the Occupied Territories during the reporting period. Israel's strict closure policies frequently restricted the ability of Palestinians to reach places of worship and practice their religions. The construction of a separation barrier by the government of Israel, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, also severely limited access to mosques, churches, and other holy sites, and seriously impeded the work of religious organizations that provide education, healthcare, and other humanitarian relief and social services to Palestinians. Such impediments were not exclusive to religious believers or to religious organizations, and at times the Israeli government made efforts to lessen the impact on religious communities. The Israeli government confiscated land (usually offering limited compensation, which churches do not accept) belonging to several religious institutions to build its separation barrier between East Jerusalem and the West Bank. However, 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.

Christians and Muslims generally enjoy good relations, although tensions exist. Strong societal attitudes are a barrier to conversions from Islam. Relations between Jews and non-Jews, as well as among the different branches of Judaism, are strained. Societal tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist and such tensions remained high during the reporting period; however continuing violence also contributes to societal tensions and was apparent during Israel's disengagement from Gaza and portions of the West Bank in 2005. The violence that has occurred since the outbreak of the second Intifada (uprising) in October 2000 has significantly curtailed religious practice in many areas of the Occupied Territories. This violence included severe damage to places of worship and religious shrines in the Occupied Territories.

Prior to the establishment of the Hamas-led government on March 28, 2006, the U.S. Government discussed religious freedom problems with the PA and the Israeli government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The Gaza Strip covers an area of 143 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 million persons. The West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) covers an area of 2,238 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.4 million persons, not including approximately 250,000 Israeli settlers. East Jerusalem covers an area of twenty-seven square miles, and its population is approximately 400,000 persons, not including approximately 180,000 Israeli settlers.

Approximately 98 percent of Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories were Sunni Muslims. According to the sum of estimates provided by individual Christian denominations (which appear significantly overstated), the total number of Christians was approximately 200,000. Other estimates placed the Christian community between 40,000 to 90,000 persons. A majority of Christians were Greek Orthodox; the remainder consisted of Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Protestant, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian, Coptic, Maronite, and Ethiopian Orthodox denominations. Christians were concentrated primarily in the areas of Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. According to municipal officials in Bethlehem, since 2002 approximately 2,800 Christians from the Bethlehem area had left the West Bank for other countries. According to Christian leaders, most left for economic and security reasons. Low birth rates among Palestinian Christians had also contributed to its shrinking minority status. There was 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, operated 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 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 (Islamic law) 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 nineteenth century, Protestant and evangelical churches established between the late nineteenth century and 1967, which, although they exist and operate, are not recognized officially by the PA, and a small number of churches that became active within the last decade, and whose legal status is more tenuous.

The first group of churches is governed by nineteenth 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. These churches are "recognized" by the Israeli Government. 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 land problems. Civil courts do not adjudicate on 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 in their efforts to obtain recognition, both from Muslims who oppose their proselytizing, and from Christians who fear that the new arrivals may disrupt the status quo. However, these churches generally operate unhindered by the PA.

In practice, the PA requires Palestinians to declare religious affiliation on identification papers. All legal matters relating to personal status must be handled in either Islamic or Christian ecclesiastical courts if such courts exist for the individual's denomination. All legally recognized individual sects are empowered to adjudicate personal status matters, and in practice most do so. Neither the PA nor the Israeli government currently has a civil marriage law. Legally, members of one religious group mutually may agree to submit a personal status dispute to a different Christian denomination to adjudicate, but in practice this does not occur. Churches that are not officially recognized by the PA or the Israeli government must obtain special permission to perform marriages or adjudicate personal status issues; however, in practice non-recognized churches advise their members to marry (or divorce) abroad.

Since Islam is the official religion of the PA, Islamic institutions and places of worship receive preferential treatment. The PA has a Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs, which pays for the construction and maintenance of mosques and the salaries of many Palestinian imams. The government of Jordan maintains responsibility for waqf institutions in Jerusalem. 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 PA requires that religion be taught in PA schools, with separate courses for Muslim and Christian students. A compulsory curriculum requires the study of Christianity for Christian students and Islam for Muslim students in grades one through six. The PA Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) revised its primary and secondary school textbooks. A USG-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.

The PA does not officially sponsor interfaith dialogue; however, it sends representatives to meetings on improving inter-religious relations and attempts to foster goodwill among Muslim and Christian religious leaders. The PA makes an effort to

maintain good relations with the Christian community; however, the PA has not taken sufficient action to remedy past harassment and intimidation of Christian residents of Bethlehem by the city's Muslim majority. The PA judiciary failed to adjudicate numerous cases of seizures of Christian-owned land in the Bethlehem area by criminal gangs. There were credible reports that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with gang members to extort property illegally from Christians. In previous years, PA officials appear to have been complicit in property extortion of Palestinian Christian residents. Several attacks against Christians in Bethlehem went unaddressed by the PA, but authorities investigated attacks against Muslims in the same area.

PA President Abbas has 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 PA observes several religious holidays, including Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Zikra al-Hijra al-Nabawiya, Christmas, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Christians also may observe the Easter 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 Regulations and the 1949 Geneva Convention relating to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War. The Israeli government considers the Hague Regulations applicable and maintains that it largely observed the Geneva Convention's humanitarian provisions. The Israeli government applies Israeli law to East Jerusalem, 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.

The Israeli government gives preferential treatment to Jewish residents of the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem, when granting permits for home building and civic services. For example, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem pay the same taxes as Jewish residents, but Palestinian residents receive significantly fewer municipal services than Jewish residents. Many of the national and municipal policies enacted in Jerusalem are designed to limit or diminish the non-Jewish population of Jerusalem. These are official policies that every Jerusalem municipal government has acknowledged and followed since 1967, and that Israeli ministers have at times openly admitted. According to Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations, the Israeli government uses a combination of zoning restrictions on building for Palestinians, confiscation of Palestinian lands, and demolition of Palestinian homes to "contain" non-Jewish neighborhoods, while simultaneously permitting Jewish settlement in predominantly Palestinian areas in East Jerusalem.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary), contains the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, among the most holy 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, with all of East Jerusalem, under Israeli security control since 1967, when Israel captured the city (East Jerusalem was formally annexed in 1980, and thus Israel applies its laws to East Jerusalem). The Haram al-Sharif is administered, however, by the Islamic waqf, a PA-affiliated but Jordanian-funded and administered Muslim religious trust for East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. The Israeli police control the compound's entrances, and limit access to the compound. The waqf can object to entrance of particular persons, such as non-Muslim religious radicals, or to prohibited activities, such as prayer by non-Muslims or disrespectful clothing or behavior, but lacks authority to remove anyone from the site, and thus must rely on Israeli police to enforce site regulations. In practice, waqf officials claimed that police often allowed religious radicals (such as Jews seeking to rebuild the ancient Temple on the site and to remove the mosques) and immodestly dressed persons to enter and often were not responsive to enforcing the site's rules.

While non-Muslims (except guests of the waqf) were not allowed to enter the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount from September 28, 2000 (the date of former Likud party head Ariel Sharon's visit which sparked unrest) until August 2003, non-Muslims could visit the site during designated visiting hours. The Israeli government, as a matter of stated policy, has prevented non-Muslims from worshipping at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount since 1967. Israeli police consistently did not permit public prayer on public safety grounds and publicly indicated that this policy has not changed in light of the renewed visits of non-Muslims to the compound or the court ruling on the issue. Waqf officials contend that the Israeli police, in contravention of their stated policy and the religious status quo, have allowed members of radical Jewish groups to enter and to worship at the site. Spokesmen for these groups have claimed successful attempts to pray inside the compound in interviews

with the Israeli media. The Waqf interprets police actions as part of an Israeli policy to incrementally reduce Waqf authority over the site and to give non-Muslims rights of worship in parts of the compound.

Since October 2000, the Israeli government, citing security concerns, 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 even for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, such as a frequently implemented restriction on males under the age of forty-five.

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. In 2005 Palestinian workers under direction of Jordanian engineers worked on restoring tiles on the Dome of the Rock and Ottoman-era stones on the southern and eastern walls of the compound. Israeli authorities prevented the waqf from conducting several improvement projects or removing debris from the site, alleging that the waqf was attempting to alter the nature of the site or to discard antiquities of Jewish origin.

Personal status law for Palestinians is based on religious law. For Muslim Palestinians, personal status law is derived from Shari'a, and various ecclesiastical courts rule on personal status issues for Christians. A 1995 PA presidential decree stipulated that all laws in effect before the advent of the PA would continue in force until the PA enacted new laws or amended the old ones. Therefore, in the West Bank, which was formerly under Jordanian rule, the Shari'a-based Jordanian Status Law of 1976 governs women's status. Under the law, which includes inheritance and marriage laws, women inherit less than male members of the family. The marriage law allows men to take more than one wife, although few do so. Prior to marriage, a woman and man may stipulate terms in the marriage contract that govern financial and child custody matters in the event of divorce. Reportedly, few women use this section of the law. Personal status law in Gaza is based on Shari'a-centered law as interpreted in Egypt; however, similar versions of the attendant restrictions on women described above apply as well.

Due to 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.

In 2002, the Israeli government, citing security concerns, began constructing 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, Muslim, and Israeli residents, and tightening of restrictions on movement for non-Jewish communities. The Israeli government asserts that it has mechanisms to compensate landowners for all takings, but there were several reports of land being taken along the barrier's route without compensation under the Absentee Property Statute or military orders.

Construction of the separation barrier continued in and around East Jerusalem during the reporting period, 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, although in some cases, the Government made efforts to lessen the impact on religious institutions.

The separation barrier made it difficult for Bethlehem-area Christians to reach the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, and it made visits to Christian sites in Bethany and in Bethlehem difficult for Palestinian Christians who live on the Israeli side of the barrier, further fragmenting and dividing this small minority community. Foreign pilgrims sometimes 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 its 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 tourists and non-tourists. After initial complaints of long lines, the Israeli government instituted new screening procedures and agreed to ease access into Bethlehem during the Christmas holiday, 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.

Hundreds of Armenian pilgrims attending the Holy Fire Celebration on April 22, 2006 were prevented by the Israeli Police from entering the Church of the Holy Sep-

ulcher in the Old City of Jerusalem despite the fact that all had the necessary permits to enter.

In February 2003, the Israeli government issued confiscation orders for land in Bethlehem to build a barrier and military positions around Rachel's Tomb (a shrine holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims). This barrier would leave the shrine on the "Israeli" side of the separation barrier. By the end of 2004, the Israeli government walled off and fortified the Rachel's Tomb area, and often restricted access to the site, only allowing Jewish visitors regular, unimpeded access and requiring prior coordination by other worshippers. In previous years, Jewish tourists visiting the shrine occasionally were harassed by Palestinians, but Israel's closure of the area and associated land expropriations impeded Muslim and Christian access to the site. Israeli settlers obtained ownership of some of the land and properties around the tomb through a disputed land deal.

In 2003, the Government of Israel confiscated land from the Baron Deir monastery in Bethlehem, which belongs to the Armenian Patriarchate, for construction of an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) patrol road in the area. Negotiations between the Patriarchate and the Israeli government reduced the amount of land confiscated.

The Armenian Patriarchate reported that the IDF caused significant damage to the property during incursions into Bethlehem in 2002. The parties reached an undisclosed agreement on compensation for this damage.

Since 2003, the Israeli government confiscated land (with some compensation generally offered but refused) belonging to three Catholic institutions in Bethany for construction of the separation barrier: The Camboni Sisters Convent, the Passionist Monastery, and the Sisters of Charity Convent and school. Construction of the barrier in this area, which was largely completed during the reporting period, involved confiscation of a significant portion of each church property. In the village of Bethany on the Mount of Olives, the Israeli government built an eight-meter high concrete separation barrier that crosses into the property of several Christian institutions. The barrier in Bethany blocks the annual Orthodox Palm Sunday procession from Lazarus' Tomb in Bethany to the Old City of Jerusalem, but Israel has constructed a crossing terminal to allow foreign pilgrims and Christians living on the West Bank side of the barrier to participate in the procession.

Israeli closure policies, imposed according to the Israeli government due to security concerns, prevented tens of thousands of Palestinians from reaching places of worship in Jerusalem and the West Bank, including during religious holidays such as Ramadan, Christmas, and Easter. There have been several violent clashes in the past between Israeli police and Muslim worshippers on the Haram al-Sharif, which waqf officials allege have been due to the large police contingent kept on the site. On a few occasions, Muslim worshippers have thrown stones at police and police have fired tear gas and stun grenades at worshippers. Muslim worshippers also have held demonstrations at the site to protest reported Jewish extremist plans to damage the mosques or create a Jewish worship area at the site. Israeli security officials and police have generally been proactive and effective in dealing with such threats. There were no incidents of rocks thrown near the Western Wall during the period covered by this report.

The Israeli government's closure policy prevented several Palestinian religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, from reaching their congregations. In previous years, several clergymen reported that they were subject to harassment at checkpoints; however, during the reporting period there were no reports of serious harassment of clergy.

During the reporting period, Palestinian violence against Israeli settlers prevented some Israelis from reaching Jewish holy sites in the Occupied Territories, such as Joseph's Tomb near Nablus. 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 ceased after disagreements erupted 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 religious sites.

While there were no specific restrictions placed on Palestinians making the Hajj, all Palestinians faced closures and long waits at Israeli border crossings, which often impeded travel for religious purposes. Palestinians generally were not allowed to use Ben-Gurion Airport. If residents of the Occupied Territories obtained a Saudi Hajj visa, they must travel by ground to Amman (for West Bankers) or Egypt (for Gazans) and then by ground, sea, or air to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Palestinians from Gaza who participated in the Hajj departed through the Palestinian-controlled Rafah crossing into Egypt.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Throughout the year Israeli authorities still required that Christian clergy leave the West Bank or Jerusalem every ninety days to renew their tourist visas, disrupting their work and causing financial difficulties to their sponsoring religious organizations. Catholic and Orthodox priests and nuns and other religious workers often from Syria and Lebanon faced long delays, and sometimes denied applications, entirely without explanation; however, the Israeli government claimed that delays were due to security processing for visas and extensions. The shortage of foreign clergy impeded the functioning of Christian congregations.

In January 2006 the IDF re-opened the Mosque to Muslim worship for the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Israeli officers selectively enforced orders preventing the muezzin at the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron from sounding the call to prayer when Jews were praying in their portion of the shrine.

There were no reports of major damage to Christian churches during this reporting period. In previous reporting periods, there were credible reports that the Israeli military caused significant damage to church property.

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. Local religious and political leaders confirmed that no such attempts to seize Muslim-owned land took place.

In the midst of growing chaos and lawlessness in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, there were credible reports in previous years that PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with members of these gangs to seize land from Christians. In one reported case, a PA judge openly told a Palestinian Christian landowner that he and his partners in the PA intelligence services required a substantial bribe to allow the landowner to remain on his property. PA officials repeatedly promised Christian leaders that they would take action in these cases, but by the end of the reporting period, no action had been taken.

Officials from the Qalqilya branch of the YMCA relocated following a firebombing of its office by local Muslims in April 2006. Local Muslim leaders have written to the Hamas-led municipal council demanding that the branch office close.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There generally were amicable relations between Christians and Muslims, although tensions exist. Relations between Jews and non-Jews often were strained. Tensions between Jews and non-Jews exist primarily as a result of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as Israel's control of access to sites holy to Christians and Muslims. 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. In previous reporting periods, there were reports that some Christian converts from Islam who publicized their religious beliefs were harassed or ostracized by their families or villages.

Muslim-Christian tension has been minimal during this reporting period, and the few instances of Muslim-Christian violence appear related to social or inter-family conflicts rather than religious disputes. Both Muslim and Christian Palestinians have accused Israeli officials of attempting to foster animosity among Palestinians by exaggerating reports of Muslim-Christian tensions.

Jewish settlers, either acting alone or in groups, engaged in assaulting Palestinians and destroying Palestinian property; however, 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. For example, there were reports of some Christian women receiving death threats from Christian family members and community leaders for marrying Muslim men during the reporting period.

In September 2005, Muslims rioted through the predominantly West Bank Christian village of Taybah, torching homes, vandalizing private vehicles, and assaulting residents. The violence followed a reported romance between a Muslim woman and a Christian man from Taybah. In October 2004, a yeshiva student spat at the Armenian archbishop of Jerusalem while he was engaged in a religious procession through the Old City. The student was arrested and ordered to remain away from the Old City for seventy-five days. He also made a formal apology. The Holy See and the country's chief rabbinate issued a joint condemnation of the assault at the end of a meeting of Catholic and Jewish officials near Rome shortly after the incident. There were several other spitting incidents, usually involving Armenian clergy due to their proximity to several Jewish quarter yeshivas. The mayor of Jerusalem, the chief rabbinate, and the heads of several yeshivas have strongly criticized such behavior and punished those involved. The armenian patriarchate was satisfied with measures that the Israeli government, Jerusalem municipality and yeshivas have taken after these incidents, but believes that more education on tolerance and respect for other religious groups would be helpful.

A March 2005 dispute over the transfer of property in Jerusalem's Old City owned by the Greek Orthodox Church to Jewish investors ended with senior Orthodox leaders calling for the removal of the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, Irineos I. The sale enraged Palestinians, who saw the deals as a betrayal of Palestinian parishioners by the mostly-Greek clergy and feared that such purchases would affect Palestinian claims on East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. Patriarch Irineos I was ousted from his position by the Orthodox synod of bishops, but did not resign, claiming that proceedings against him were illegal. Jordan and the PA have rescinded official recognition of Irineos I, but at the end of the period covered by this report Israel still recognized him as patriarch and kept a contingent of Israeli police inside the Greek Orthodox Monastery to protect him.

In general, established Christian subgroups did not welcome less-established evangelical churches. 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 it is unclear whether the attackers' motives stemmed from religious extremism as opposed to ultra-nationalism, the activists felt that local Israeli police did not actively pursue the suspects and oppose the Christian Peacemaker Teams' presence in Palestinian villages.

The strong correlation between religion, ethnicity, and politics in the Occupied Territories at times imbues the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a religious dimension. The rhetoric of some Jewish and Muslim religious leaders has been harsher since the outbreak of the Intifada in October 2000.

In previous years, Muslims at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount threw stones at Jewish worshippers on the Western Wall plaza, leading to major police confrontations; however, there were no incidents of stone-throwing at the plaza during the period covered by this report.

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 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, on October 28, 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. Israeli settler radio stations often depicted Arabs

as subhuman and called for Palestinians to be expelled from the West Bank. Right-wing, pro-settler organizations such as Women in Green, and various Hebron-area publications, have published several cartoons that demonize Palestinians. Also, the sermons of some Muslim imams occasionally included anti-Semitic messages, such as a May 13, 2005, sermon delivered by Shaykh Ibrahim Mudayris that ran on PA television, in which he compared Jews (in the context of land conflicts) to "a virus, like AIDS." 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.

There were instances of Jewish-nationalist extremists harassing Muslims. On several occasions, a group of Jewish-nationalist extremists 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 shrine, an act that Muslims considered an affront.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Prior to the establishment of the Hamas-led PA government, U.S. officials maintained dialogue with PA officials on religious issues, in particular on incitement in the Palestinian media. In light of the new PA government led by Hamas which has not agreed to the Quartet principles that it disavow violence, recognize Israel, and accept previous agreements and obligations, U.S. officials have no contact with PA officials under the authority of the prime minister or any other minister in the Hamas-led cabinet, including working-level officials in these ministries. Contact is allowed 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 consulate general continues to maintain contacts with representatives of the Jerusalem waqf-an Islamic trust and charitable organization that owns and manages large amounts of real estate, including the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem-as well as with the various Christian churches and Jewish communities in Jerusalem.

U.S. officials regularly meet with religious representatives to ensure that their legitimate grievances are reported and addressed.

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 general officers met with representatives of the Bethlehem Christian community and traveled to the area to investigate charges of mistreatment of Christians by the PA. The consulate general raised the issue of seizure of Christian-owned land in discussions with PA officials.

In October 2004, a representative from the Office of International Religious Freedom visited Jerusalem and met with government officials, NGO representatives, Muslim Waqf officials, and Christian clergy and religious workers, particularly those negatively impacted by construction of the separation barrier.

In several cases, the Israeli government agreed to consider changes to the route of the barrier in Jerusalem near several Christian institutions and installed pedestrian gates in the barrier to facilitate the passage of priests and other religious workers.

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. According to the Constitution, Islam is the state religion; religious practices that conflict with the official interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. In January 2006, a Shari'a court received a complaint for apostasy against a convert from Islam to Christianity. The plaintiff subsequently dropped the charges but the defendant has not yet received an official guarantee that no new charges will be filed. In 2005 an appellate court upheld the Amman Shari'a Court's 2004 conviction of a convert from Islam to Christianity for apostasy. 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.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups contributed to religious freedom. Relations between Muslims and Christians generally are good; however, adherents of unrecognized religions and Muslims who convert to other faiths face societal discrimination.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,436 square miles and a population of 5.9 million. More than 95 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Official government figures estimate that Christians make up 4 percent of the population; however, government and Christian officials privately estimate the figure to be closer to 3 percent. It is estimated there are at least twenty thousand Druze, a small number of Shi'a Muslims, and fewer than 400 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, and Presbyterian churches. Other Christian groups, including the Baptists, 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. There are a number of Chaldean and Syriac Christians and Shi'a among the estimated 500 thousand to 600 thousand 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 non-indigenous Shi'a living in the Jordan Valley and the south. Druzes are registered as "Muslims" and, as they have their own court in Al Azraq, can administer their own personal status matters.

Foreign missionaries operating in the country include representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Campus Crusade for Christ, Samaritan's Purse, The Evangelical Alliance Mission, Life Agape, Intervarsity, Navigators, Christar, Arab World Ministries, Operation Mobilization, Southern Baptist International Mission Board, the Conservative Baptists, Frontiers, Brother Andrew, the Jesuits, Christian Brothers, Rosary Sisters, Benedictines, Anglican Church Mission Society, the Society of Friends (Quakers), Comboni Sisters, Little Sisters of Jesus, the Religious of Nazareth, Sisters of St. Dorothy, the Daughters of Mary the Helper (Salesian Sisters), the Little Sisters of Nazareth, the Little Family of the Annunciation, Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition, Basiliennes Chouerites, Focolare Sisters, Franciscans (OFM), Sons of Divine Providence (Don Orione Fathers), Association Fraternal International, Institute of the Incarnate Word, Franciscans of the Cross, Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Franciscan Missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Daughters of Mary of the Enclosed Garden, Theresian Institute, and the Missionaries of Charity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for 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, Islam is the state religion; religious practices that conflict with the official interpretation of Shari'a are prohibited.

The Constitution, in Articles 103–106, provides that matters concerning the personal status of Muslims are the exclusive jurisdiction of Shari'a courts, which apply Shari'a law in their proceedings. Personal status includes religion, marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. Personal status law follows the guidelines of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is applied to cases that are not explicitly addressed by civil status legislation. Matters of personal status of non-

Muslims are the jurisdiction of Tribunals of Religious Communities, according to Article 108.

Churches and other religious institutions that wish to receive official recognition must apply to the Prime Ministry for registration. Recognized non-Muslim religious institutions do not receive subsidies; they are financially and administratively independent of the Government and are tax-exempt. Some churches were registered with the Ministry of Interior as "societies" rather than churches.

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. The prime minister unofficially confers with an interfaith council of clergy representing officially registered local churches on all matters relating to the Christian community, including the registration of new churches. The Government refers to the following criteria when considering official recognition of Christian churches: The faith must not contradict the nature of the Constitution, public ethics, customs, or traditions; it must be recognized by the Middle East Council of Churches; the faith must not oppose the national religion; and the group must include some citizen adherents. Groups that the Government deems to engage in practices that violate the law and the nature of society or threaten the stability of public order are prohibited; however, there were no reports that any religious groups were banned.

Public schools provide mandatory religious instruction for all Muslim students. Christian and Baha'i students are not required to attend courses that teach Islam. In 1996 the late King Hussein and the Ministry of Education approved a plan to provide religious instruction for Christian students in public schools. In 1998 the Government launched an experimental program in four districts to incorporate Christian education in the public school curriculum for Christian students only, and on condition that the school's Christian population meet a size requirement. However, this program has not been implemented because the Christian denominations have not agreed upon a common curriculum. 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."

There are two major government-sponsored institutions that promote interfaith understanding: The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies and the Royal Academy for Islamic Civilization Research (the Al al-Bayt Foundation). The last time the Government held an international Christian conference in government facilities was in 2002.

On January 23, 2006 a Royal Decree was issued to recognize "Copts" as a religious community. In December 2005 the Government approved a request by the Coptic Orthodox bishop in Amman for the establishment of a church court for the Coptic community. Although the court has not yet been established, the Coptic priest has authority to settle all personal status issues for members.

In August 2005 a member of the royal family, Prince Hamza, hosted a conference that promoted interfaith dialogue among religious communities. The conference included religious leaders from numerous countries and focused on Islam as a faith with democratic principals. In November 2004, supported by the Government, the Grand Mufti issued a proclamation, known as the "Amman Message" stating that the "true nature" of Islam is one of moderation and tolerance. He encouraged the "silent majority" to promote Islam as a faith capable of building bridges of understanding between all nations.

The Islamic feasts of Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet's Ascension, and the Islamic New Year, are celebrated as national holidays. Christmas and the Gregorian calendar New Year also are national holidays. Easter is a government-recognized holiday and Christians may request leave for other Christian feasts approved by the local Council of Bishops.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were no reports that the practice of any faith was prohibited; however, the Government does not officially recognize all religious groups. Some religious groups, while allowed to meet and practice their faith, faced societal and official discrimination. In addition, not all Christian denominations have applied for or been accorded legal recognition.

The Government does not recognize the Druze or Baha'i faiths as religions but does not prohibit their practice. The Druze face official discrimination but do not complain of social discrimination. Baha'is face both official and social discrimination. On national identity cards, which normally identify the bearer's religious commu-

nity, the Government records Druzes as Muslims, and indicates no religion for Baha'is. The Baha'i community does not have its own court to adjudicate personal status and family matters; such cases are heard in Shari'a courts. The Government does not officially recognize the Druze temple in Azraq, and four social halls belonging to the Druze are registered as "societies." The Government does not permit Baha'is to register schools or places of worship. Employment applications for government positions occasionally contain questions about an applicant's religion. Additionally, the Constitution stipulates that the prime minister must be a Muslim citizen. 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 Druzes, but they are permitted to hold office under their Government classification as Muslims.

The Government does not recognize Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but each is allowed to conduct religious services without interference.

The Government does not interfere with public worship by the country's Christian minority.

The Government recognizes Judaism as a religion; however there are reportedly no Jordanian 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 law 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. The Government does not recognize the legality of such conversions. Under Shari'a, converts are regarded as apostates and may be denied their civil and property rights. In the past, this principle has not been applied, but during the last reporting period a convert to Christianity was found guilty of apostasy and stripped of many of his civil 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, such punishment has never been applied in the country.

There is no statute that expressly forbids proselytism of Muslims; however Government policy requires that foreign missionary groups refrain from public proselytism. In August 2005 two foreign missionaries were expelled from the country after a member of parliament complained to the minister of the interior that they were proselytizing among children without the permission of the parents. In the past, the Government has taken action against some non-Orthodox Christian missionaries in response to Orthodox Christians who complained that missionary activities disrupt the peace and cohesion of society.

Despite past difficulty in obtaining legal status, the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS), a Christian training school for pastors and missionaries, was registered with the Government and operates as a cultural center. JETS is permitted to appoint faculty and administration, but as a consequence the Government denies accreditation as an academic institution. Students and faculty from abroad wishing to attend JETS were sometimes able to live temporarily in the country by using tourist visas; however, because of the lack of accreditation, visas were sometimes not granted. Many students overstayed their visas and upon departure from the country were required to pay two dollars for each day they spent without a visa. JETS is forbidden by the Government to accept Muslim students. During the reporting period, JETS denied the request of a Muslim former member of parliament to attend classes due to the Government's policy against Muslims studying at the center. In the past, seven foreign students who had converted from Islam to Christianity were forced out of the program and required to leave the country. The Government authorized JETS to own property, and in August 2003 the organization broke ground on a new facility. During the reporting year, the Government confiscated a shipment of approximately one hundred books ordered by JETS. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs intervened and secured the release of the books to JETS.

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. The law was designed primarily to prevent Government opponents from preaching politically-oriented sermons in mosques.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Trusts manages Islamic institutions and the construction of mosques. It also appoints imams, provides mosque staff salaries, manages Islamic clergy training centers, and subsidizes certain activities sponsored

by mosques. The Government monitors sermons at mosques and requires that preachers refrain from political commentary that could instigate social or political unrest.

In January and February 2006, Jihad Al-Momani, former chief editor of the weekly newspaper Shihan, and Hussein Al-Khalidi, of the weekly Al Mihar, were arrested, released, and then re-arrested for printing controversial cartoons depicting Muhammad. Although released, the two journalists each face charges of "defaming the Prophet Muhammad" which is punishable by up to three months imprisonment; and additional charges of "insulting God" which carries a maximum sentence of three years. Both men have pleaded "not guilty" to the charges stating that their intent was to garner support for the movement against the Danish paper that originally published the cartoons. On May 30, 2006 the two men received the minimum sentence of two months prison, but were immediately released on bail with the possibility that the sentences will be commuted to fines of approximately $170 (JD 120) each.

According to the Constitution, religious community trusts ("awqaf") and matters of personal status such as religion, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Shari'a courts for Muslims and separate non-Muslim tribunals for each religious community recognized by the Government. There is no provision for civil marriage or divorce. The head of the department that manages Shari'a court affairs (a cabinet-level position) appoints Shari'a judges, while each recognized non-Muslim religious community selects the structure and members of its own tribunal. All judicial nominations are approved by the prime minister and commissioned officially by royal decree. The Protestant denominations registered as "societies" come under the jurisdiction of one of the recognized Protestant church tribunals. There are no tribunals assigned for atheists or adherents of unrecognized religions such as the Druze and the Baha'i. Such individuals must request one of the recognized courts to hear their personal status cases.

Shari'a is applied in all matters relating to family law involving Muslims or the children of a Muslim father, and all citizens, including non-Muslims, are subject to Islamic legal provisions regarding inheritance. 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 conversion is not recognized legally by the authorities, and the individual continues to be treated as a Muslim in matters of family and property law.

In 2002, the Shari'a and civil court systems adjudicated a dispute concerning custody of two minors, raised as Christians, whose father allegedly converted to Islam shortly before his death. The widow contended that her husband's signature on the conversion certificate was a forgery. The courts assigned legal custody to the Christian widow's brother, who is a convert to Islam. However, the children remained in the mother's physical custody pending the result of a counter suit she filed against her brother, alleging disinterest in the children and misuse of the children's trust funds. In April 2005, a court ruled in the mother's favor and assigned her legal custody of the children. In May 2005, the widow's brother appealed against the ruling, but an appellate court rejected the petition.

Some Christians are unable to divorce under the legal system because they are subject to their denomination's religious court system, which does not allow divorce. Such individuals sometimes convert to another Christian denomination or to the Islamic faith to divorce legally.

Druzes, 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). 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 have been 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 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. However, Eleker must still appear before a court in order to receive an official guarantee that no new charges

will be filed. Eleker and his pastor postponed the date of this appearance until the end of July, having heard rumors of an upcoming change in the apostasy law which might help his case. The case was still pending at the end of the reporting period.

On September 13, 2004, on the order of a Shari'a court, a convert from Islam to Christianity was arrested and held overnight on charges of apostasy. On November 23, 2004 a Shari'a court found the defendant guilty of apostasy. The ruling was upheld on January 25, 2005 by a Shari'a appeals court. The verdict declared the convert to be a ward of the state, striped 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 reportedly left the country with his family and is not believed to have returned.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners 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. However, according to the law, the father of any child, whether Muslim or Christian, may restrict the child's travel.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Baha'is faced some societal discrimination.

The majority of the population views religion as central to one's personal identity. 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, there were no known cases in which local officials encouraged conversion from Christianity to Islam.

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 in the country, as well as with private religious organizations.

In October 2005, the Embassy funded an interfaith conference to commemorate the first anniversary of the Amman Message. The conference, titled "The Amman Message in Action" was organized by the Jordan Interfaith Coexistence Research Center and brought together experts, professors, and clerics from the three monotheistic faiths from Jordan, the Middle East, and the United States. The conference produced an interfaith endorsement of the principles of the Amman Message, and culminated in an interfaith celebration of the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

From September 10 to October 1, 2005, the Embassy also sponsored the participation of Shari'a judges in an international visitor program designed to expose these religious scholars to the diversity, religious tolerance and freedom of U.S. society, including meeting religious leaders from several religious groups and U.S officials

who raised religious freedom concerns. From November 21 to December 9, 2005, the Grand Mufti of Jordan traveled to the United States on an International Visitor exchange for the same purpose.

In September 2005, Embassy officers met with moderate Islamic political leaders dedicated to tolerance and religious dialogue. The U.S. Department of State continued its multi-phase exchange program to bring U.S. religious leaders to the country and Jordanian imams and other religious leaders to the United States for outreach activities aimed at grassroots communities and youth.

KUWAIT

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government placed some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the state shall protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a (Islamic law) is a main source of legislation.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Government officials met with various religious groups in the country and hosted a conference to promote religious tolerance. The Government made efforts to promote moderation through the formation of a special committee on strengthening moderation through information campaigns in schools and training sessions for religious leaders. The new emir sponsored an international conference in London on moderation in Islam and pledged to sponsor two more conferences in the coming year, one in the United States and one in Russia.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Tensions came to the surface during the reporting year as a result of an attack on a Shi'a mosque and requests made by minority religious groups to build or gain recognition for religious-based institutions.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy hosted events designed to bring different religious groups together, sent religious leaders to the United States on professional exchange programs, and promoted a dialogue between U.S. military chaplains and local imams.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 6,880 square miles, and its population is approximately 2.9 million, of which 973,000 are citizens. The remaining residents are foreign workers and their families. More than 100,000 Bidoon (stateless) Arabs, with residence ties to the country, either have no documentation, or are unwilling to disclose their nationality. The national census did not distinguish between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. Estimates suggested that approximately 70 percent of citizens, including the ruling family, belonged to the Sunni branch of Islam. Most of the remaining 30 percent were Shi'a Muslims. These estimates came from voting, which often occurs along sectarian lines, and personal status documents. There are approximately 150 to 200 Christian citizens, and a small number of Bahai citizens. Some 100,000 of the noncitizen residents are Shi'a. Some areas had relatively high concentrations of Sunnis or Shi'a; for instance, Jahra province had a small Shi'a population compared to Sunnis. For the most part, however, the country was fairly integrated religiously.

The primarily expatriate Christian population is estimated to be more than 300,000, with alternate estimates at more than 400,000. The Christian community included: 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 seventy congregations serving approximately 40,000; and the Roman Catholic Church, with two official churches and a third worship facility in a rented house, with an estimated 250,000 members (Latin, Maronite, Coptic Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Malabar, and Malankara congregations all worshipped at the Catholic cathedral in Kuwait City).

There were many other unrecognized Christian sub-groups, totaling tens of thousands of members. These included: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Indian Orthodox Syrian Church, Mar Thoma, and Seventh-day Adventists.

There are also communities of Baha'is (estimated 400 adherents), Buddhists (estimated 100,000), Hindus (estimated 300,000), and Sikhs (approximately 10,000 to 20,000).

Missionary groups in the country served non-Muslim congregations. The Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing to Muslims.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government placed some limits on this right. The Constitution also provides that the state shall protect the freedom to practice religion in accordance with established customs, provided that it does not conflict with public policy or morals. The Constitution declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is a main source of legislation.

The Government exercises direct control of the dominant Sunni strain of Islam. This creates certain advantages and disadvantages for both Sunnis and Shi'a. For example, the Government appoints Sunni imams and monitors their Friday sermons. It also finances the building of Sunni mosques. The Government does not exert this control over Shi'a mosques and Shi'a must 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, create hatred, or spread dissension among the public. There are laws against blasphemy, apostasy, and proselytizing. These laws sometimes were used to restrict religious freedom.

The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has official responsibility for overseeing religious groups. Officially recognized churches must deal with a variety of government entities, including the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (for visas and residence permits for pastors and other staff) and the Municipality of Kuwait (for building permits and land concerns). While reportedly there was no official government list of recognized churches, seven Christian churches 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 pastors and staff to operate their churches.

Four Christian sub-groups are widely understood to enjoy full recognition by the Government and are allowed to operate compounds officially designated as churches: Anglican, Coptic Orthodox, National Evangelical (Protestant), and Roman Catholic. They faced quotas on the number of clergy and staff they could bring into the country. Some of the churches find the quotas adequate. Others found them insufficient and considered their existing facilities inadequate to serve their respective communities. They faced significant problems in trying to build new facilities.

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).

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 only as private homes. They rented facilities from private citizens for worship services and other religious purposes, putting them in a vulnerable position if the owner decides to stop renting to them since it is difficult to find other landlords willing to rent to religious groups. No other churches or religious groups had legal status, but adherents generally were allowed to operate freely in private homes provided that they did not violate laws limiting public assembly or prohibiting proselytizing.

The procedures for registration and licensing of religious groups appear to be connected to those for non governmental organizations (NGOs). In 1993, the Council of Ministers ordered all unlicensed NGOs to cease activities, but this order has never been enforced. There were hundreds of unlicensed, informal NGOs, clubs, and civic groups in the country. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor issued an increasing number of new NGO licenses including sixteen during the reporting year. At the end of the reporting period, there were 163 NGO applications pending with the Ministry. Nonrecognized Christian groups perceived it as impossible to gain official recognition and contented themselves with worshipping in private.

In February 2005 the Government announced it would remove all street-side Islamic charity boxes, due to difficulty monitoring and confirming whether the funds

were diverted to uses other than the intended charitable cause; removal was completed in March 2005. All charitable contributions of licensed Islamic charities in the country require Central Bank approval. There is a charitable organizations department within the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor that is responsible for regulating religious charities based in the country, which reviews their applications for registration and monitors their operations.

The Higher Advisory Committee on Completion of the Application of Islamic Shari'a Provisions is tasked with preparing society for the full implementation of Shari'a in all fields. The committee makes recommendations to the emir on ways in which current 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, but some Islamists would like to amend that to the only source of legislation.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Islamic New Year, Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Ascension of the Prophet, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha. The workweek in the country is generally Saturday through Wednesday. 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 and prohibits other religious instruction in private schools that have one or more Muslim students.

In March 2006 the Government, through the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, sponsored a conference entitled "We and the Other," to emphasize Islam's openness to cooperation with persons of other religious groups. It also screened for foreign diplomats a film proposal for a television series on the life of Muhammad. In May 2006, it held in London the first of a series of three international conferences on moderation in Islam. Government officials continued to meet with Muslim leaders and the heads of various Christian denominations to promote interfaith understanding. The Government designated a committee specifically designed to strengthen religious moderation, which undertook an education campaign in the schools to encourage respect for the opinions and beliefs of others. As part of the moderation program, the Government planned to open an institute devoted to promoting moderation amongst Muslims and increased understanding of Islam by non-Muslims.

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. An attack on a Shi'a mosque in October 2005 by alleged Sunni extremists caused concern among the Shi'a community, but it proved to be an isolated incident. Members of the Shi'a community have expressed concern over the relative scarcity of Shi'a mosques due to the Government's slow approval of the construction of new mosques and the repair of existing ones. (There were approximately thirty-five 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. Three of these mosques were reportedly in the final stages of construction and were scheduled to open in 2006.

There were approximately 650 Shi'a husseiniyas (Shi'a gathering places) in the country, most of which are informal or unlicensed. Husseiniyas are used for social gatherings, funerals, and for annual religious observances. Generally, the country's husseiniyas are privately owned and associated with prominent Shi'a families.

Family law is administered through religious courts. The Government permits Shi'a to follow their own jurisprudence in matters of personal status and family law at the first-instance and appellate levels. In 2003, the Government approved a long-standing Shi'a request to establish a Shi'a court of cassation (Supreme Court) to handle Shi'a personal status and family law cases at the highest judicial level. However, the court has not yet been established because there are no Shi'a (Ja'fari) judges for this level of jurisdiction. In November 2003, the Government publicly announced its approval of another long-standing Shi'a request for the establishment of an independent Shi'a (Ja'fari) Waqf, an agency to administer religious endowments in accordance with the Ja'fari school of jurisprudence. The Shi'a Waqf has been able to carry out its work freely.

Shi'a who aspire to serve as imams are forced to seek appropriate training and education abroad (mainly 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 (Faculty of Shari'a). The Ministry of Education was reviewing a Shi'a application to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics. Shi'a leaders have called on the Ministry of Education to remove references from high school Islamic education textbooks declaring Shi'a as nonbelievers. 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.

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.

Shi'a remained under-represented in upper levels of government. In 2006 four Shi'a were elected to the fifty-member National Assembly, compared with five Shi'a in the previous assembly and six in the assembly before that. A new cabinet was formed in February 2006, after the death of the country's long-serving emir and installation of new government leaders. The new prime minister retained the only Shi'a Minister from the previous cabinet (Dr. Ma'asouma Mubarak, Minister of Planning, and the country's first female minister) and added another Shi'a (Dr. Yousef Al-Zalzalah, Minister of Commerce and Industry, who was a member of parliament as well). Another new cabinet, also with two Shi'a members, was formed after the June 2006 parliamentary elections. Dr. Ma'asouma Mubarak became Minister of Communications while Dr. Abdul Hadi Al-Salih took on the position of State Minister for National Assembly Affairs. There were no known Shi'a in the Kuwait State Security (KSS) forces, and they were reportedly under-represented in the National Guard.

In March 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. Television networks, also for the first time, broadcast programs on the Shi'a religious holiday of Ashura. The Government 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 Anglican, Armenian Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, National Evangelical, and Catholic churches operated freely on their premises and hold worship services without Government interference. Their leaders also state 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 recognized legally 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 signage, 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.

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. The Melkites applied for the land because they worshiped in a rented villa whose owner wanted to evict them. After repeated delays, however, the Municipal Council rejected the Church's request outright after the period covered by this report. The ostensible reason for the rejection was traffic concerns, but religious opposition to church-building was almost certainly the reason for refusal. The Government has the power to reverse the Municipal Council's decision. In general, churches have found it all but impossible to get permission to build new facilities.

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.

There have been past examples of anti-Semitic rhetoric in government-sponsored education curricula, such as citing Qur'anic verses to denounce the political intentions of the Jewish people, specifically in reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Members of religious groups not sanctioned in the Qur'an, such as Bahá'ís, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, may not build official places of worship since these religious groups lack legal status, but they 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 have been unable to gain permission for a crematorium to cremate their deceased. Sikhs also engaged in other religious activities, including public marriage and other celebrations, without government interference.

In 2003 the Government reportedly closed the file on the National Evangelical Church (NEC) due to the NEC's alleged failure to comply with the National Manpower Support Law by employing the requisite number of citizens. The Government had reinstated the NEC's open file status by May 2004, and the church was able to apply for and renew visas for pastors and staff; however, in accordance with the Law, the Government imposed substantial annual fines for every visa application or renewal submitted on behalf of non-citizen staff, in addition to routine visa and residency fees. Church leaders negotiated with Government authorities to resolve the fine issue and exempt the church from the law's Kuwaitization requirements. NEC church leaders continued to report that they did not have access to the number of visas they would like to fully staff their activities.

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. 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 amid erroneous media reports that the Church planned to take over a historic site for the school and for the purpose of proselytizing. Press statements by Municipal Council members suggested the request was refused on ideological grounds rather than on zoning or other technical grounds. The Municipal Council controls access to Government land and has become a focus for society's internal division over granting land to non-Muslim religious institutions.

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 twenty 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 seventy congregations, was also overcrowded. The Church would like more land to build a new church but had 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 has been 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 planned to level the current Coptic Church building to make way for a road project. It had granted the Church 6,500 square meters of new land in Hawally district to build a new place of worship; however, it has not offered any financial assistance to construct the new church. Construction began in the first quarter of 2006, and the Church expected it to take more than a year to complete the project. The church agreed to move to a temporary facility if the road project began while the church was under construction. No date had been set for the church's demolition.

In December 2004 and 2005, a group of Salafi Islamists in the region of Jahra forced merchants to remove Christmas items such as trees and greeting cards from their stores, claiming holiday items connected to Christmas and New Year's celebrations were contrary to Islamic teachings. In 2004 the group reportedly produced a petition with 350 signatures demanding the removal, asserting that allowing such goods to be available was haram (forbidden).

The Government prohibits missionaries from proselytizing among Muslims; however, they may serve non-Muslim congregations. In November, the police arrested five preachers, none of whom were country natives, who went door-to-door espousing the ideology of al-Qaeda.

The Government controls the content delivered by imams and preachers in their sermons. The Government banned a number of religious leaders, including the

imam of the Grand Mosque, from giving Friday sermons after they strayed from government-approved topics. The Government especially clamped down on preachers at unlicensed mosques and those who commented too directly on politics.

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 a significant number of Bibles and other Christian religious materials, including videotapes and compact discs, for use solely by government-recognized church congregations. The Book House Company Ltd. was the only company that had an import license to bring in such materials, which requires approval by government censors. The company supplied only bookstores operated within the Christian compounds. There were reports of customs officials confiscating non-Islamic religious materials from private citizens upon their arrival at the airport. Domestic workers reported that their employers confiscate religious articles such as Bibles and rosary beads, along with nonreligious items. In 2003, police arrested five foreign workers for allegedly proselytizing with Bibles in the Andalus district. State security officials later released the individuals on the condition they sign commitments pledging to refrain from proselytizing.

In April 2006 the Government banned eighteen books from being displayed at an Islamic book festival organized by the Social Reform Society, a religiously conservative NGO affiliated with the Kuwaiti 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.

Although there was a small community of approximately 150 to 200 acknowledged Christian citizens, a 1980 law prohibits the naturalization of non-Muslims; however, citizens who were Christians before 1980 are allowed to transmit their citizenship to their 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.

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 that it would facilitate the obtaining of travel documents by Bidoon, but whether these declarations would have a tangible effect remained unclear.

Inheritance is governed by Islamic law, which differs according to the branch of Islam. In the absence of a direct male heir, Shi'a women may inherit all property, while Sunni women inherit only a portion with the balance divided among brothers, uncles, and male cousins of the deceased.

During the reporting period, there were no reports of the Government prohibiting state employees from displaying or practicing any elements of their faith. However, in late 2003, the headmistress of a public high school in Farwaniya district reportedly dismissed several female students for failure to wear the Islamic hijab (headscarf). The school readmitted the students and the headmistress was criticized widely in the local media.

The law requires jail terms for journalists who defame religion. Academic freedom is limited in practice by self-censorship. 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 2004, an appeals court sentenced a journalist to a 1-year suspended sentence for a 2004 article deemed to defame the Qur'an. The publication's editor received a 50KD fine (equivalent to $175 USD) in 2004. Three Islamist activists filed the complaint resulting in the court case.

In January 2004 the Court of Misdemeanor sentenced a Shi'a citizen to one year in jail with hard labor and fined him approximately 1,000 KD ($3,500 USD) for pro-

ducing and distributing an audiotape allegedly defaming the Islamic (Sunni) religion, degrading its rituals and rites, and defaming and abusing Muhammad's Companions. In February 2004, the citizen reportedly was released from prison in error by an Amiri pardon issued on the occasion of the country's National Day. The Government subsequently issued a warrant for his arrest, but he reportedly remained at large. In March 2004, the Appeals Court dismissed the original misdemeanor verdict and referred the citizen's case to the Public Prosecutor for re-trial by the Criminal Court. As a result, the citizen also faced more serious charges of violating the State Security Law. In May 2004, the Criminal Court sentenced him to ten years in jail in absentia on charges of defaming Sunni Islam. Most Shi'a believe that hardline Sunni Islamist pressure was behind the Government's harsh action against the individual, even though they too publicly condemned his anti-Sunni statements and the audiocassette incident.

In February 2006 a new Press and Publications law was passed which increased 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.

The Ministry of Interior, General Customs Department, arrested and deported thirty-two individuals in 2004 for allegedly practicing sorcery and confiscated alleged sorcery-related materials during the reporting period.

The Government does not designate religion on passports or national identity documents.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Education continued to review a Shi'a proposal to establish a private college to train Shi'a clerics; however, at the end of the reporting year, no action had been taken. The Ministry also continued to review a request from the Catholic Church to allow Catholic students at certain private schools to study the Catechism during the time allotted for Islamic instruction.

Interfaith dialogues took place among Christian denominations through the framework of a council representing Christian leaders from various churches and numerous informal meetings. Government officials promoted interfaith understanding by meeting with Shi'a and Sunni leaders. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs also sponsored a conference and screened a film in an attempt to increase religious tolerance.

In 2005, more than 10,000 worshippers from the Bohra community celebrated the Sultan of Bohra's birthday without interference. The Bohra participants, who are Shi'a Muslims mainly from Gujarat in western India, gathered at their community center.

The death of Pope John Paul II received wide press coverage throughout April 2005, including full-page spreads in local newspapers. In a country where the Catholic Church estimates its population as 10 percent of all residents (although this could not be independently verified), the Government issued a public statement expressing "agony of the Christian brothers" following the Pope's death. Senior Government officials attended commemoration events at the Catholic cathedral, and an Amiri envoy led a delegation representing the Government at the Pope's funeral at the Vatican. Local newspapers provided extensive coverage of Christmas and Easter celebrations in 2005 and 2006. The play Nunsense had a successful run in the country without incident despite its portrayal of Christian nuns.

Christian churches held memorial services after the death of Amir Shaykh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

In general there were amicable relations among the various religious groups, and citizens generally were open and tolerant of other religious groups; however, there was a small minority of ultraconservatives opposed to the presence of non-Muslim groups.

While some discrimination based on religion reportedly occurred on a personal level, most observers agreed that it was not 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; however, others did not see conversion to Islam as a factor in this regard.

The conversion of Muslims to other religions is forbidden. While such conversions reportedly have occurred, they have been done quietly and discreetly. Known converts 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.

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.

In 2004 some well-known Salafis called on Muslims to refrain from congratulating non-Muslims on their holidays. In December 2004, the Chairman of the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society's (RIHS) Good Word Committee announced in an Arabic daily newspaper that it is forbidden for Muslims to imitate non-Muslims in all matters, including participating in non-Muslim festivals and holidays. The announcement stated that Muslims are "prohibited from sharing the Christian and other infidel religious groups' holidays in any form, whether by attendance, exchange of gifts, or expression of joy."

There were incidents of unofficial anti-Semitic commentary from media pundits and some mosque preachers. On August 7, 2005, a private citizen purchased newspaper space to run an advertisement with anti-Semitic imagery. On August 10, 2005, the Government referred the two newspapers that carried the advertisement to the attorney general for prosecution under the law, which forbids publishing religious material without a license.

In October 2005 a group of several dozen or perhaps as many as 200 alleged Sunni extremists attacked a Shi'a mosque in the Jahra area. The attack stirred fears of Sunni-Shi'a tension in the country, since the mosque had been attacked previously. No further incidents were reported. Despite initial reports that the Government had provided insufficient security for the mosque, the Government made arrests and the mosque owner was satisfied with the response.

In 2005, an extremist Salafi cleric preached violent jihad in the country. The Government blocked access to the Salafi preacher's website in February and banned him from preaching at his mosque in March. He then was detained by KSS forces for alleged links to two of the January shoot-outs between law enforcement officials and militants.

The Government's moderation program was an attempt to temper the effects of any such intra-religious tension. The program was well received in general, despite one member of parliament's publicly labeling the advocates of moderation "terrorists with deviant ideas." The same member of parliament lost his seat in the 2006 elections.

Shi'a complain of a "glass ceiling" that prevents them from obtaining promotions as easily as their Sunni counterparts. They reportedly had more difficulty in obtaining appointments in certain government agencies. The appointment of two Shi'a Ministers in the February 2006 cabinet and in the July 2006 cabinet was a positive step.

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. U.S. Embassy officials meet frequently with recognized Sunni, Shi'a, and Christian groups, as well as representatives of various unrecognized religious groups and of NGOs that deal with religious freedom concerns.

The ambassador and other Embassy officers actively encourage the Government to address the concerns of religious leaders, such as overcrowding, lack of adequate worship space, 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.

The Embassy has made an effort to increase its dialogue with and understanding of the Municipal Council, whose control over land grants and other permits give it a key role in allowing religious institutions to flourish.

In an effort to develop a dialogue with Muslim moderates, the Embassy worked with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs to send two imams to the United States on a Single-Country International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) entitled, "Religion in the U.S." The project showed the participants the scope of religious freedom in the United States and encouraged the promotion of tolerance and interreligious understanding. A third official of the ministry participated in another IVLP, "Interfaith Dialogue in the U.S." Both projects consisted of three-week visits to five representative cities in the United States. Participants met with counterparts of different religious backgrounds. All three participants said that the visit radically transformed their preconceived notions about life in the United States. They reported that they gained an appreciation for the interreligious dialogue in the United States, the freedom of worship that Muslims have in America, and the tolerant diversity they discovered in their 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 absolute freedom of belief and guarantees 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 during the reporting period. The status of religious freedom continued to be affected by the 1989 Ta'if Agreement that, in accordance with demographic developments in the country, mandated an increase in Muslim representation in Parliament so that it would be equal to the representation of the country's Christian community. In addition, the Ta'if Agreement, which concluded the country's fifteen-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 an element critical to the country's stability. 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 do not suffer discrimination in the practice of their faith.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 fifteen-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 four million. Because parity among confessional groups remains a sensitive issue, a national census has not been conducted since 1932. However, according to three reputable demographic studies conducted over the past two years, 28–35 percent of the population was Sunni Muslim, 28–35 percent Shi'a Muslim, 25–39 percent Christian, and 5–6 percent Druze. Over the past sixty years, there has been a steady decline in the number of Christians as compared to Muslims, mostly through emigration of large numbers of the Christian Maronite community. There were also very small numbers of the Jews, Baha'is, Mormons, Buddhists, and Hindus.

Of the eighteen officially recognized religious groups, four were Muslim, twelve Christian, one Druze, and one Jewish. The main branches of Islam were Shi'a and Sunni. The smallest Muslim communities were 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 were 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 operating in the country, primarily from Catholic and evangelical Christian churches, 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 absolute freedom of religion and guarantees 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; 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 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 fifteen-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.

The following holy days are considered national holidays: New Year, 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.

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.

Citizens belonging to a faith not recognized by the Government are permitted to perform their religious rites freely; however, some rights may not be secure in that they fall outside the "confessional" system of allocating political power. 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.

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. One notable exception is the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which has significantly reduced the role of confessionalism in the appointment and promotion of officers and noncommissioned officers. 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.

Officially unrecognized groups such as Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus, and some evangelical denominations, may own property and assemble for worship without government interference; however, they are disadvantaged under the law because legally they may not marry, divorce, or inherit property in the country. Protestant evangelical churches are required to register with the Evangelical Synod, a non-governmental 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.

In February 2004 the Government denied a residency permit to the nonresident leader of a local Pentecostal community, who entered the country on a visitor's visa, and granted him seven days to depart the country. The Government informed him he needed to register as a religious worker and re-apply for a residency permit. He left the country as ordered, but was unable to return. He claimed he could not fulfill the requirement of registering as a religious worker because the head of the Evangelical Synod refused to register his congregation.

In October 2004 the minister of labor ordered shops in the coastal city of Sidon to close on Fridays at the request of the predominantly Muslim Merchants' Association of Sidon. This order was reportedly only partially observed.

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 only perform marriages 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.

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.

In 2003 the cabinet endorsed a draft law allowing the country to adopt a curriculum proposed by the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization making Islamic culture the core of the educational curriculum at all levels in schools and universities. Following strong condemnation and opposition from a wide range of Christian figures, including the head of the Maronite Church, the Shi'ite speaker of parliament argued that the bill violated the spirit of the Constitution. The Government withdrew the bill in late 2003.

Article 473 of the Penal Code stipulates a maximum prison term of one 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 during the reporting period.

Anti-Semitism

In 2003 Hizballah's Al-Manar television aired a Syrian-made, anti-Semitic minidrama that it claimed to accurately portray the history of the Zionist movement. The station aired the inflammatory series Al-Shatat (The Diaspora) in daily segments during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan when television audiences peak. The Arab-Israeli conflict and Israel's former occupation of south Lebanon nurtured a strong antipathy for Israelis, and 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-Semitic literature was published and distributed with the cooperation of Hizballah.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 October 2004, the outgoing minister of education yielded to years of pressure from Muslim leaders and ordered the closure of public schools on Fridays, the Islamic day of prayer. The decree stipulated that if students, teachers, and the neighborhood religious authority agreed, a local public school could continue to operate on Fridays and close over the Saturday–Sunday weekend, which Christians generally prefer. The decree resulted in the recognition of Muslim sensibilities in those neighborhoods where Muslims are the majority.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were periodic reports of tension between religious groups during the reporting period, which may be attributed to political differences and the fact that citizens still struggled with the legacy of a fifteen-year civil war that was fought largely along religious lines.

During the reporting period, several bombs were detonated in commercial areas of predominantly Christian neighborhoods. Leaders of all religious denominations condemned the bombings, but responsibility had not been determined by the end of the reporting period. It was presumed that these bombings were acts of violence aimed at provoking religious tensions.

In the months of March through May 2005, in the run-up to parliamentary elections, sectarian rhetoric steadily increased, culminating in a statement by the Maronite Bishops' Council that implied Muslim voters should not have a deciding voice in the election of Christian candidates. This statement by the council, as well as other politically motivated rhetoric from other religious groups, exacerbated 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 St. Maroun church (Maronite) and the St. Nicholas church (Greek Orthodox) causing slight material damage. Authorities arrested 441 persons, mostly for damage to the diplomatic facility. These cases were pending at the end of the reporting period.

In 2003 a bomb exploded outside the home of a western Christian missionary in Tripoli, killing one person.

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 in promoting 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. Embassy officers met regularly with leaders of religious communities and regularly discussed issues relating 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 television. 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.

In 2004 the Embassy sent a member of the Islamic-Christian Dialogue Committee on a U.S. Department of State International Visitor Program to participate in an inter-faith program in the United States. Additionally, U.S.-funded programs in rural areas required civic participation, often involving villages of different religious backgrounds, with the aim of promoting cooperation between religious groups.

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, 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." The Government opposes militant forms of Islam, which it views as a threat. The Government is tolerant of other religious groups but prohibits the proselytizing of Muslims.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period. Persons rarely were harassed because of their religious practices unless such practices were perceived as having a political dimension or motivation. Followers of religions other than Islam generally were free to practice according to their beliefs. There is no civil law prohibiting conversion from Islam to another religion.

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

In February 2004 the U.S. Government established an official diplomatic presence in the country and immediately began discussing religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. On May 31, 2006, the U.S. Government upgraded the existing U.S. Liaison Office in Tripoli to an Embassy.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 703,816 square miles and a population of 5,765,563, of which approximately 97 percent was Sunni Muslim. There was no known Shi'a community. There were small Christian communities, composed almost exclusively of foreigners, predominantly African immigrants. A small Anglican community composed of one resident priest and mostly African and Indian immigrant workers in Tripoli were part of the Egyptian diocese. The Anglican bishop of Libya was resident in Cairo. There were Unitarian churches in Tripoli and Benghazi as well as small Unitarian congregations scattered throughout the country. There were an estimated

fifty thousand Roman Catholics who were served by two bishops—one in Tripoli and one in Benghazi; both communities were multinational. Catholic priests and nuns served in all the main coastal cities, and there was one priest in the southern city of Sebha. Most of them worked in hospitals, orphanages, and with the handicapped and elderly. The Catholic bishops, priests, and nuns wore religious dress in public and reported virtually no discrimination. An accredited Nuncio resided in Malta, a bishop in Tripoli, and Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox priests in both Tripoli and Benghazi.

There may have been be a very small number of Jews, but their location was unknown. In 1974 the World Jewish Congress reported that there were no more than twenty Jews in the country. The Jewish community, which numbered approximately thirty-five thousand in 1948, left for Israel and other countries at various stages between 1948 and 1967. The Government has been rehabilitating the "medina" (old city) in Tripoli and has renovated the Jewish community center that currently serves as a city archive; however, the synagogue has not reopened.

In his August 31, 2004, Revolution Day speech, Libyan leader Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi called for compensation for Jews who had been expelled. Discussions regarding possible compensation for confiscated communal properties have been underway since October 2004.

There was no information on the number of foreign missionaries in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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, 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." The Government opposes militant forms of Islam, which it views as a threat. The Government is tolerant of other religious groups but prohibits the proselytism of Muslims.

The Government regulates the number of places of worship allowed for each Christian denomination present in each city. The Government continued to ban the once powerful Sanusiyya Islamic order; in its place, the country's leader, Colonel Mu'ammar Al-Qadhafi, established the World Islamic Call Society (WICS), which is the Islamic arm of the Government's foreign policy and is active worldwide. The WICS is also responsible for relations with other religious communities, including Christians. The churches reported good cooperation with the WICS. The WICS's main purpose is to promote a moderate form of Islam that reflects the Government's religious views and to ban Islamic groups whose beliefs and practices are at variance with it. Although most Islamic institutions are under government control, prominent families endow some mosques. However, these mosques generally adhere to the government-approved interpretation of Islam.

Although generally tolerant of other religious groups, the Government also exhibited intolerance. On April 10, 2006 Al-Jazeera television aired a speech by Al-Qadhafi on the occasion of the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in which he stated that all people are required to be Muslims, the Bible that exists today is a forgery that incites hatred, female Christian followers of Jesus are naked, and Europe and the United States should either convert to Islam or conduct war against Muslims. While not an official statement of the Government, Al-Qadhafi's position as the country's leader does raise concerns about governmental attitudes.

The Government recognizes the Islamic holy days of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government controls most mosques and Islamic institutions, and even mosques endowed by prominent families generally must conform to the government-approved interpretation of Islam. According to reports, individuals rarely were harassed because of their religious practices, unless such practices were perceived as having a political dimension or motivation. It is prohibited to proselytize Muslims.

Members of minority religious groups were allowed to conduct services, and Christian churches operated openly. The Government routinely granted visas and residence papers to religious staff from other nations. The Government restored the former Catholic church in the medina, which, during the reporting period, was used

as an art exhibition hall. The Government had not honored a promise made in 1970 to provide the Anglican Church with appropriate alternative facilities when it took the property used by the Church. The Anglicans shared a villa with other Protestant denominations until 1998, when the Government gave them a small suite of offices to use for worship. Similarly, the Government has not returned Unitarian Church property confiscated in 1971 despite requests from the Church.

The Government allowed priests to visit six Bulgarian medics imprisoned since 1999 for allegedly infecting children with HIV. The medics, convicted and sentenced to death in May 2004, appealed and their sentences were remanded to a lower court on December 25, 2006. The medics' trial remained ongoing at the end of the reporting period. They were allowed to worship with the Greek Orthodox priest in Tripoli.

There were no known places of worship for other non-Muslim religions such as Hinduism, the Baha'i Faith, and Buddhism, although adherents are allowed to practice within the privacy of their homes. Foreign adherents of these religions are allowed to display and sell religious items at bazaars and other gatherings.

Religious instruction in Islam is required in public schools, but in-depth instruction in other religions is not taught. The Government does not issue information on the religious affiliation of children in public schools, and there were no reports of children transferring to private schools for alternative religious instruction.

The Government monitors and restricts all political activity. It also restricts religious literature, including Islamic literature, published in or allowed into the country.

The country adheres to traditional Islamic law 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 make the Hajj must be at least forty-years old.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On March 2, 2006 the country released eighty-five members of the Muslim Brotherhood, also known as the Libyan Islamic Group, many of whom had been held since June 1998. In September 2005 the Supreme Court overturned sentences imposed on them by the now-abolished People's Court. An ad hoc lower court retried the cases and upheld the original sentences, prior to the government pardon.

Some practicing Muslims have shaved their beards to avoid harassment from members of the security services, who tend to associate wearing beards with advocacy of militant Islam aimed at overthrowing the Government. In the late 1980s the Government began to pursue a domestic policy directed against Islamic extremists; the events of September 11, 2001, reinforced Qadhafi's view that Islamic militancy is a potential rallying point for opponents of the Government. The security service did not harass those who frequently attend mosque services.

There continued to be reports of armed clashes between security forces and Islamic groups that oppose the Government and advocate 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Information on the relationship among religious groups in society is limited; however, some members of non-Muslim minority religious groups reported that they do not face harassment by authorities or the Muslim majority on the basis of religion.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

In February 2004 the United States established an official presence in the country and immediately began discussing religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Additionally, the Embassy established an outreach program to maintain close communication with the leaders of the various religious denominations in the country. 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 Rice rescinded the country's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism.

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 practiced their faiths.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government places certain restrictions on Christian religious materials and proselytizing. Several small religious minorities are tolerated with varying degrees of official restrictions. The Government monitored the activities of mosques and placed some restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities were deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature.

While there is generally an amicable relationship among religious groups in society, converts to Christianity may face social ostracism.

U.S. Government officials met regularly with members of all 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, and the U.S. funded programs that promoted religious freedom and tolerance.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 172,320 square miles. According to the 2004 census, the population was approximately thirty million, and more than 99 percent of the citizens were Sunni Muslims.

According to Jewish community leaders, there were approximately four thousand Jews, the majority of whom resided in Casablanca. The estimated size of the Rabat Jewish community was 200 to 250. The remainder of the Jewish population was dispersed throughout the country.

The expatriate Christian community, Catholic and Protestant, consisted of approximately five thousand practicing members, although some estimates were as high as twenty-five thousand. Most Christians resided in the Casablanca and Rabat urban areas.

The Baha'i community, also located in urban areas, numbered 350 to 400 persons. The Government recognizes the presence of a Shi'a Muslim community; however, the size was 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 monitored the activities of mosques and placed other restrictions on Muslims and Islamic organizations whose activities were deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice and become political in nature. Jewish and foreign Christian communities openly practiced their faiths. A small foreign Hindu community freely performed cremations and held 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.

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 observed religious holy days without interference from government authorities.

During the reporting period, the Government did not license or approve new religious groups or religious organizations. In 2004 an English-speaking church group received nonprofit association status as the "Protestant Church." Other registered churches and associations included the Catholic, Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, French Protestant, and Anglican churches.

The Rabat Protestant Church and other minority religious groups have been operating unfettered by government authorities since the 1970s, and registration allows the groups to make financial transactions and undertake other business as private associations and legal entities.

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. In the Faculty of Letters at the University of Rabat, two professors teach Hebrew and one teaches comparative religion in the Department of Islamic Studies. Throughout the country, approximately twelve other professors teach Hebrew.

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.

King Mohammed VI established the Islamic-Judeo Observatory, a body of international scholars, to promote religious tolerance and monitor intolerance. The country was the only Arab country with a Jewish museum. In May 2006, for the second year in succession, a three-day, contemporary Christian music festival featuring foreign and local bands took place. This event was organized by a foreign Christian evangelical organization in coordination with local community leaders and officials.

The Government organizes the annual "Fez Festival of Sacred Music," which in the past has included musicians from Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Native American spiritual traditions. The year 2006 marked the eleventh anniversary of the festival. During the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the king hosted colloquia of Islamic religious scholars that, among other matters, considered ways to encourage tolerance and mutual respect within Islam and between Islam and other religious groups. For the third consecutive year, a woman spoke during Ramadan in the presence of the king and religious scholars. A woman was also a member of the Supreme Council of the Ulema, or religious scholars.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments monitored Friday mosque sermons and the Qur'anic schools to ensure the teaching of approved doctrine. At times the authorities suppressed the activities of Islamists but generally tolerated activities limited to the propagation of Islam, education, and charity. Security forces commonly closed mosques to the public shortly after Friday services to prevent use of the premises for unauthorized political activity. The Government strictly controlled authorization to construct new mosques. Most mosques were constructed using private funds.

During academic year 2005 the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments initiated two programs. One was a graduate-level theological course, part of which focused on Christianity and Judaism. The other was a course designed to train men and women to be counselors and teachers in mosques throughout the country. Fifty women, the first group of female murshidats (guides), were assigned to mosques in May 2006.

In April 2004 King Mohammed VI, as the "Commander of the Faithful," announced plans to restructure the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments to ensure the promotion of moderate Islam and guard against imported Islamic doctrines and the preaching of extremist ideology in mosques.

In 2004 the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Endowments took charge of and monitored the activities of mosques, placed restrictions on activities deemed to have exceeded the bounds of religious practice or become political in nature, and began to provide religious training for imams. Authorities stated that all of these measures were put in place in order to avoid exploitation of mosques for political propaganda and to prevent supportive activities such as distributing pamphlets and raising funds.

The Government does not recognize the Islamic Justice and Charity Organization (JCO), which rejects the king's spiritual authority. The JCO holds to a strict interpretation of Islam and advocates an Islamic state contrary to the Constitution. The JCO continued to hold meetings, organize and participate in demonstrations, and operate two websites, although the Government did not allow the JCO to publish written materials. In April 2006 the Government started entering JCO members' houses, forcing the cessation of weekly meetings and continued closing the JCO's weekly meetings and open houses throughout May and June. JCO materials were confiscated and as many as 400 members were arrested. The vast majority of detainees were released after several hours, but at least one member was scheduled to appear in court after the reporting period.

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 three to six 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 missionaries either limit their proselytizing to non-Muslims or conduct their work quietly. The Government has cited the penal code's prohibition on proselytism in most cases in which courts ruled to expel foreign missionaries. During this reporting period, there were no reports of police questioning foreign missionaries for being in possession of Christian materials.

Citizens who convert to Christianity and other religions may face social ostracism, and a small number of converts have faced short periods of questioning or detention by authorities for proselytizing and have been denied issuance of passports. There were no reports of such occurrences during the reporting period.

On January 6, 2005, according to the foreign nongovernmental organization (NGO) Middle East Concern, police arrested on charges of proselytism a Muslim citizen who had converted to Christianity, and whose passport was found on a foreign Christian arrested for distributing Christian materials in Tetouan. On October 27, 2005, the authorities dropped the charges against the person. Middle East Concern also reported that as of mid-July 2004 authorities had either confiscated or refused to renew the passports of five citizens who had converted from Islam to Christianity. Three of the converts received their passports by August 2004, but foreign Christian leaders in the country alleged that two of them experienced police harassment and long interrogations. The remaining two received their passports by the end of the 2005 reporting period. The reports on these individuals could not be confirmed by other sources.

Voluntary conversion is not a crime under the criminal or civil codes. Muslim citizens are allowed to study at Christian and Jewish schools. A Jewish school in Casablanca includes Muslim students, and a hospital run by the Jewish community provides care to low-income citizens regardless of religion.

A small foreign Christian community operated churches, orphanages, hospitals, and schools without any government restrictions. Missionaries who refrain from proselytizing and conduct themselves in accordance with societal expectations largely are left unhindered; however, those whose activities become public face expulsion. In March 2005 authorities expelled a South African pastor of a Protestant church in Marrakesh for not having lucrative employment, although authorities had renewed his temporary residence permit annually for five years until January 2005. The deportation followed a series of news and opinion articles in the local press concerning the presence of foreign Christian missionaries in the country, the Government's invitation to U.S. Christian leaders to visit and meet with political and religious officials, a discussion on comparative religion that took place in March in a Marrakesh classroom, and the job performance of the minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments.

In May 2004 authorities detained for several hours and subsequently expelled seven foreign missionaries for distributing Christian materials in Marrakesh's main square.

In the past, some missionaries have been questioned by authorities or have not been granted a "temporary residence permit" enabling them to remain in the country on a long-term basis. No similar incidents occurred during this reporting period.

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. Nevertheless, Arabic Bibles have been sold in local bookstores.

There are two sets of laws and courts pertaining to marriage, inheritance, and family matters, one for Muslims and one for Jews. The family law courts are administered, depending on the law that applies, by rabbinical and Islamic authorities who are court officials. Parliament authorizes any changes to those laws. In 2004, under the new Family Law Code (Moudawana) for Muslims, new civil judges were recruited. In 2003 the minister of justice established family courts to adjudicate divorce and child custody cases in anticipation of proposed reforms to the code. These courts addressed family matters for Muslim citizens, and the judges were trained in Shari'a (Islamic law) as applied in the country. By the end of 2005, the Ministry of Justice, often in cooperation with international NGOs, had trained 300 new judges and 60 family court judges, while 600 judges had participated in continuing education courses. Plans called for the establishment of seventy family courts with one for each province. At the end of 2004, the Government had established twenty of these courts. No new specific family courts had been established by year's end as the Government was reviewing the policy. Family matters for Jewish citizens were handled by a parallel legal system available to them.

Rabbinical authorities continue to administer family courts for Jews. Non-Qur'anic sections of Islamic law on personal status are applicable to non-Muslim and non†Jewish persons. Christians inherit according to the civil law, which reflects the changes to the family code. Jews maintain their own separate inheritance law based on Jewish religious law.

Reforms of the family law code passed in 2003 gave women the same rights as men in divorce cases, granted mothers custody of minor children, increased the marriage age to eighteen and imposed significant limitations on polygyny. The reforms also abolished codified traditions that favored male heirs based on the official interpretation of Shari'a. The new code is predicated on the establishment of family courts and the creation of a family aid fund, and it relies on the court system more than the previous law did. On February 14, 2005, the one-year anniversary of the new code, top government officials held a conference during which they presented evidence of the code's success, including statistics showing a decrease in the number of divorces, an increase in women's requests for divorces, and a decrease in polygyny requests. However, the women's rights group Ligue Democratique des Droits de la Femme (LDDF) disputed the government statistics on divorce in a February 2005 report, branding the reforms a "failure" due partly to conservative courts, to which the code provides much leeway. Implementation of the code continued throughout this reporting period. Under the criminal code, women generally are accorded the same treatment as men.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

While there is generally an amicable relationship among religious groups in society, Muslim converts to Christianity may face social ostracism.

From January 2005 until the May 2005 concert of contemporary Christian music, there was a societal debate on the influence of evangelical Christianity in the country. In spite of considerable criticism, the Government allowed the May 2005 concert to take place, and no negative incidents occurred. In May 2006 the concert was held for the second time without incident.

Foreigners attended 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. Annual Jewish commemorations took place around the country, and Jewish pilgrims from around the region regularly visited holy sites in the country.

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 avoided disclosing their religious affiliation; however, Baha'is' concerns for their personal safety and property did not prevent their functioning in society, and some held government jobs.

There was widespread consensus among Muslims regarding religious practices and interpretation. While some dissenters challenged the religious authority of the king and call for the establishment of a government more deeply rooted in their vision of Islam, the majority of citizens did not appear to share their view.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy officials encountered no interference from the Government in making contacts with members of any religious group.

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. A U.S. program focused on religious tolerance and freedom was held that utilized the United States as a model.

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. U.S. programs enabled one university professor, two journalists, and

two religious leaders to study the relationship between religion and civic education in the United States.

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 during the reporting period.

During the period covered by this report there were no reports of problems concerning religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government of Morocco through the U.S. Embassy in Rabat and the U.S. Department of State as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The territory has an area of approximately 102,706 square miles and a population of 273 thousand. The overwhelming majority of the population was Sunni Muslim.

There was a small foreign community working for the U.N. Peacekeeping Mission in the territory (known by its French acronym, MINURSO); most of its members were 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 detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

OMAN

The Basic Law, in accordance with tradition, provides for the freedom to practice religious rites if the practices do not breach public order. The Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there are some de facto limitations on proselytizing and printing religious material. The Basic Law declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 119,498 square miles, and its population is 2.33 million, of whom 1.8 million are citizens, according to the 2003 national census. While no official statistics were kept on religious affiliation, most citizens were Ibadhi or Sunni Muslims. The Government does not give official preference to any particular religious group. Statistical data on the religious affiliation of the population may be collected but is not publicized. There was a small but significant population of Shi'a Muslims concentrated in the capital area and along the country's Batinah coast. Ibadhism, a form of Islam distinct from Shi'ism and the "orthodox" schools of Sunnism, was the dominant religious sect in the country. Oman is the only country in the Islamic world to have had a majority Ibadhi population. A distinguishing feature of Ibadhism is the choice of ruler, known as the imam, who is appointed by communal consensus. Additionally, there was a small community of ethnically Indian-Hindu citizens and reportedly a very small number of Christian citizens, who came from India or the Levant, who have been naturalized.

The majority of non-Muslims were noncitizen immigrant workers from South Asia. There were a number of Christian denominations represented.

While there was no information regarding missionary groups in the country, several faith-based organizations operated. Clergy of the Anglican Church, the Reformed Church of America, and other Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox groups were present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law, in accordance with tradition, provides for the freedom to practice religious rites if the practices do not breach public order. The Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Basic Law declares that Islam is the state religion and that Shari'a is the source of all legislation. Within these parameters, the Government permitted freedom of worship for non-Muslims. The Basic Law prohibits discrimination against individuals on the basis of religion or religious group. Some non-Muslims worship at churches and temples built on land donated by the Sultan, including at least seven Christian and Hindu complexes in three major cities. Adherents of other religious groups, typically found among expatriate residents, practiced their rites in less formal facilities, such as company labor compounds or personal residences.

All religious organizations must be registered with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and the Government restricts some of their activities. The criterion for registration is not clear. Religious groups seeking registration must submit an application to the ministry. The ministry investigates the number of affiliates and area of concentration and if approved, the ministry issues a written letter to the group allowing them to engage in religious activity or to establish a place of worship.

One non-Muslim religious organization present in the country for several decades has had its application for formal registration pending at the Ministry for several years. Anecdotal evidence suggested that visiting non-Muslim organizations are permitted to operate within legal boundaries if a registered entity agrees to sponsor them with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The Government has sponsored forums at which differing interpretations of Islam have been examined, and government-sponsored interfaith dialogues took place on a regular basis. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs hosted several Christian and Muslim scholars and lecturers of various schools of thought to discuss interfaith relations and tolerance in Islamic traditions. In April 2006 the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs participated in a forum in Qatar on U.S.-Islamic dialogue.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Eid al-Adha, Islamic (Hijra) New Year, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, Ascension Day, and Eid al-Fitr.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Citizens and noncitizen residents are free to discuss their religious beliefs within the limits of the law; however, the Government prohibits non-Muslims from proselytizing Muslims. The Basic Law does not specifically prohibit proselytizing, nor does any other law; however, in practice the Government used immigration regulations and laws concerning morals to restrict individuals suspected of engaging in proselytizing.

Under Islamic law, a Muslim who recants belief in Islam is considered an apostate and dealt with under applicable Islamic legal procedure. During the reporting

period, there were no cases of persons punished for conversion, and the Government asserts that it has no legal authority to prosecute persons for changing their religious beliefs. Proselytizing non-Muslims by Muslims is allowed but discouraged. The Government records religious affiliation on national identity cards for citizens and on residency cards for noncitizens. Religious affiliation was previously recorded on passports; however, they no longer contain this information. Statistics on religious affiliation are not published.

The Government prohibits non-Muslim groups from publishing religious material, although non-Muslim religious material printed abroad may be imported. Members of all religious groups are free to maintain links with coreligionists abroad and to undertake foreign travel for religious purposes. Clergy from abroad are permitted to visit to carry out duties related to registered religious organizations.

The Government expects all imams to preach sermons within the parameters of standardized texts distributed monthly by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The Government monitors sermons at mosques to ensure that imams do not discuss political topics and stay within the state-approved orthodoxy of Islam. The ministry maintains a website and toll-free number whereby questions concerning the practice of faith and worship can be answered by the grand mufti or his representatives. The grand mufti regularly appears on television and radio to answer questions from the public.

Some aspects of Islamic law and tradition, as practiced in the country, discriminate against women. Shari'a favors male heirs in adjudicating inheritance claims. While there was continuing reluctance to take an inheritance dispute to court for fear of alienating the family, women increasingly were aware of and taking steps to protect and exercise their rights as citizens. When the country acceded in April 2005 to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it attached reservations on any provision within the convention deemed to be not in accordance with Islamic law.

Public schools must provide instruction in Islam; however, noncitizen students may attend schools that do not offer instruction in Islam. Instruction in Islam is a component of the basic curriculum in all public school grades K–12. The curriculum focuses on the Qur'an and Hadith, the life of Muhammad and his companions, and the five pillars of the Islamic faith.

Military bases maintain at least one mosque and one imam for the convenience of military personnel. Moreover, training facilities dedicate approximately three sessions per week for the study of Islamic subjects. Non-Muslim members in the military are not prevented from practicing their religion or compelled to undertake mandatory Islamic studies; however, if they wish to worship they must seek places to do so on their own.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious discrimination in the private sector was largely absent. Christian theologians have met with local Islamic authorities and with members of the faculty at the country's major university. Private groups that promote interfaith dialogue were permitted to exist as long as discussions did not constitute an attempt to cause Muslims to recant their Islamic beliefs. Societal attitudes toward proselytizing and conversion generally were negative.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. This included inquiries into the arrests of the alleged Ibadhi conservatives during the previous reporting period. Representatives of the U.S. Embassy freely participated in local religious ceremonies and have contact with members of non-Muslim religious groups. During the reporting period, the Embassy sponsored the visit of a U.S. research specialist in the field of Islamic studies, who addressed audiences (including at the Sultan's Grand Mosque) on prophecy among the Arabs.

QATAR

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting the public system and public behavior; however, the Government continues to prohibit proselytizing by non-Muslims and places some restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the strictly conservative Wahhabi order of the Sunni branch.

The status of respect for religious freedom improved somewhat during the reporting period. The Constitution explicitly provides for freedom of worship, including the adoption of laws that provide for the freedom of association and public assembly. On April 25–27 2006, the country held its fourth conference on interfaith dialogue. In April 2006, construction began on the first Christian church to be built since the coming of Islam. 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 generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of approximately 4,254 square miles and its population is an estimated 900,000, of whom approximately 200,000 are believed to be citizens. Of the citizen population, Shi'a Muslims accounted for approximately 10 percent and Sunni Muslims 90 percent. The majority of the estimated 600,000 noncitizens were individuals from South and Southeast Asian and Arab countries working on temporary employment contracts, along with their accompanying family members in some cases. They belonged to the following religious groups: Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baha'is. Most foreign workers and their families lived near the major employment centers of Doha, Al Khor, Messaeed, and Dukhan.

The Christian community is composed of Indians, Sri Lankans, Filipinos, Africans, Europeans, Arabs, and Americans. It includes Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic, Anglican, and other Protestant denominations. The Hindu community is almost exclusively Indian, while Buddhists include South, Southeast, and East Asians. Most Baha'is come from Iran. Religion is not indicated on national identity cards and passports, nor is it a criterion for citizenship according to the Nationality Law. However, nearly all Qatari citizens were by definition either Sunni or Shi'a Muslims, except for a Syrian Christian and a few Baha'is and their respective families who were granted citizenship.

No foreign missionary groups operate openly in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of worship in accordance with the law and the requirements of protecting society and public behavior. However, the Government continued to prohibit proselytizing by non-Muslims and placed some restrictions on public worship. The state religion is Islam, as interpreted by the strictly conservative Wahhabi order of the Sunni branch. Shi'a Muslims practice most aspects of their faith freely, and they may organize traditional Shi'a ceremonies and perform rites such as self-flagellation. The nationality law does not impose any restrictions on religious identity.

The Government and ruling family are linked inextricably to Islam. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs controls the construction of mosques, clerical affairs, and Islamic education for adults and new converts. The emir participates in public prayers during both Eid holiday periods and personally finances the Hajj for pilgrims who cannot afford to travel to Mecca.

The Government has granted legal status to Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Coptic, and many Asian Christian denominations. It maintains an official register of approved religious congregations.

The following Islamic holy days are considered national holidays: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Converting to another religion from Islam is considered apostasy and is technically a capital offense; however, since the country gained independence in 1971 there has been no recorded execution or other punishment for such a crime.

The Government regulates the publication, importation, and distribution of non-Islamic religious literature. Individuals and religious institutions are allowed to import Bibles and other religious items for personal or congregational use. In addition, religious materials for use at Christmas and Easter are readily available in local shops.

Religious services were held without prior authorization from the Government; however, congregations may not publicly advertise them in advance or use visible religious symbols such as outdoor crosses. Christian services are regularly held and open to the public. Some services, particularly those on Easter and Christmas, drew more than one thousand worshippers.

Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is, and members of other religious groups do not operate as freely as Christian congregations, because they have not sought official permission from the Government. However, there was no official effort to harass or hamper adherents of these religious groups in the private practice of their religion.

No foreign missionary groups operated openly in the country. In June 2004, a new criminal code was enacted that established new rules for proselytizing. Individuals caught proselytizing on behalf of an organization, society, or foundation for any religion other than Islam, may be sentenced to a term in prison of up to ten years. If proselytizing is done by an individual, for any religion other than Islam, the sentence is imprisonment of up to five years. According to this new law, individuals who possess written or recorded materials or items that support or promote missionary activity are imprisoned for up to two years.

Discrimination in the areas of employment, education, housing, and health services occurred, but nationality was usually the determinant more than religion.

Islamic instruction is compulsory in public schools. While there were no restrictions on non-Muslims providing private religious instruction for children, most foreign children attended secular private schools. Muslim children were allowed to go to secular and co-educational private schools.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim litigants may request the Shari'a courts to assume jurisdiction in commercial or civil cases. In 2005, a new panel was established in the courts for the Shi'a. The panel decided cases in the following areas: Marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other domestic disputes. Convicted Muslims may earn points for good behavior and have their sentences reduced by a few months by memorizing the Qur'an.

The official interpretation of Shari'a imposes some restrictions on Muslim women. Muslim wives have the right to inherit from their husbands. Non-Muslim wives inherit nothing, unless a special exception is arranged. Shari'a is also applied in cases of divorce. Both parents retain permanent rights of visitation; however, local authorities do not allow a non-citizen parent to take his or her child out of the country without permission of the citizen parent. Women may attend court proceedings. They are generally represented by a male relative; however, they may represent themselves. According to Shari'a, the testimony of two women equals that of one man, but the courts routinely interpret this on a case-by-case basis. A non-Muslim woman is not required to convert to Islam upon marriage to a Muslim; however, many make a personal decision to do so. A non-citizen woman is not required to become a citizen upon marriage to a citizen. Children born to a Muslim father are considered to be Muslim.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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 emir and top Government officials strongly supported the swift construction and establishment of churches. The Government assigned a coordinator in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to speed up the process and facilitate all required building procedures and related matters, 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 fifty-year lease on a large piece of property on the outskirts of Doha on which they intend to erect six churches at their own expense. The churches were expected to pay nominal lease fees of a few hundred

dollars a year, renewable after ten years. The property was expected to include an Anglican church that may also be used by other Protestant denominations, a church to serve thirty four Indian-Christian congregations, a church for the country's small but influential Coptic community, and a site for two Orthodox churches, one Greek and one Eastern Rite. In December 2005, the foundation stone for the Catholic Church was laid and the ground-breaking took place at the end of April 2006. This would be the first church built since the coming of Islam. Other groups were in the process of raising funds for the construction of their churches. Also, 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 could now directly approach any Government agency to conduct their church affairs.

Each church was granted permission to apply for visas for visiting clerics to preside over and assist in church services. Non-Muslim religious figures were seen in public.

The Fourth Conference for Religious Dialogue took place on April 25–27, 2006, in Doha. Representatives from the three largest monotheistic religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—were invited. Invitations were extended to the Anglican Church, Coptic Church, Middle East Churches Council, Orthodox Church, the Vatican, and Jewish rabbis, among others. Rabbis from the U.S. and other countries attended and were full participants.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Relations between persons of differing religious beliefs generally are amicable and tolerant. The press and media generally treat non-Muslim religious groups in a respectful manner.

SECTION IV. U.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 ambassador and other U.S. Embassy officials also met with representatives from religious communities in the country to discuss religious freedom issues, including protection of the interests of minority congregations and allegations of discrimination on religious grounds. These concerns were brought to the attention of appropriate officials in the Government and on the National Human Rights Committee.

SAUDI ARABIA

The country is a monarchy with a legal system based on its interpretation of Islamic law (Shari'a). Islam is the official religion, and the law requires that all citizens be Muslims. The Government does not provide legal recognition or protection for freedom of religion, and it is severely restricted in practice. The public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited. As a matter of policy, the Government confirmed that it guarantees and protects the right to private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious practice; however, this right was not always respected in practice and is not defined in law.

There generally was no change in the status of religious freedom during the reporting period. However, the Government identified and confirmed its policies with regard to religious practice and tolerance in a number of key areas. The Government continued a campaign against religious extremism, and top officials, including the king, continued to call for the promotion of tolerance. There were reports that some imams (clerics) in their Friday sermons called for all citizens to show respect for other religious faiths. However, there continued to be instances where imams made intolerant statements toward Jews and other religious groups.

During the reporting period, the Government put into place policies to limit harassment of religious practice and curb violations by the mutawwa'in (religious police, officially known as the Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice). Reports of harassment of non-Muslims and non Sunni-Muslims by mutawwa'in contin-

ued, but there were fewer reports than in the past. The Government enforced a strictly conservative interpretation of Sunni Islam. Muslims who do not adhere to the officially sanctioned interpretation of Islam can face significant societal discrimination and serious repercussions at the hands of mutawwa'in. Members of the Shi'a minority continued to face political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including discrimination in employment, little representation in official institutions, and restrictions on the practice of their faith and on the building of mosques and community centers.

The Government confirmed its policy to protect the right to private worship and the right to possess and use personal religious materials. However, it did not provide for this right in law. Despite this allowance, there were reports of mutawwa'in raids on private residences and detentions of non-Muslims for alleged religious violations, such as possession of non-Muslim literature or holding non-Muslim worship services; however, there were fewer reports than during the previous reporting period. Many non-Muslims continued to worship in fear of harassment and in such a manner as to avoid discovery by police or mutawwa'in. Although the Government did not provide statistics on the numbers of individuals arrested for religious violations, anecdotal evidence suggested that there was a decrease in both long-term and short-term detentions, and in arrests and deportations of non-Muslims. However, there were also reports that mutawwa'in, using both Muslim and non-Muslim informants, targeted non-Muslim religious leaders and organizers, and non-Muslim religious groups for harassment, arrest, and deportation in an effort to deter groups from conducting private, non-Muslim religious services.

During the reporting period, the Government made clear in the context of various discussions its policy to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religious groups and within Islam. In December 2005, the King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue convened the fifth national dialogue forum, entitled, "We and the Other: A National Vision for Dealing with World Cultures." The final national vision paper submitted to the King Abdullah emphasized adherence to Islamic values and customs, and stressed respect for others' beliefs and openness to other cultures. In December 2005, King Abdullah hosted a ministerial summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which produced the communique "A Ten Year Plan of Action for the Muslim World." The communique included provisions calling for religious tolerance, and King Abdullah inaugurated the conference with a call for moderation, tolerance, rejection of extremist violence, and reform of educational programs (including textbooks and curricula).

The Government clarified that its policy is to halt the dissemination of intolerance and combat extremism both within the country and abroad, including through the educational system and in sermons. The Government confirmed that it continues to review educational materials to remove and revise disparaging references to other religious traditions and fire or retrain imams whose preaching promotes extremist religious thought. Some journalists at a few, mostly English language papers, continued to criticize abuses by the religious police publicly. However, religious discrimination and sectarian tension in society continued during the reporting period, including denunciations from government-sanctioned pulpits of non-Muslim religions and the Shi'a branch of Islam.

The majority of citizens support a state based on Islamic law, although there were varying views regarding how this should be interpreted and implemented.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Senior administration officials continued to raise religious freedom concerns with the Government, including on specific cases. During the reporting period, senior U.S. officials discussed with the Government their policies concerning religious practice and tolerance. This made it possible to identify and confirm a number of key policies that the Government has made clear that it is pursuing and will continue to pursue for the purposes of promoting greater freedom for religious practice and increased tolerance for religious groups.

In 2004, then Secretary of State Colin Powell designated Saudi Arabia as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In September 2005 Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice re-designated Saudi Arabia as a CPC, 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 its population was approximately 26.7 million, including an estimated foreign population of more than 7 million. The foreign population reportedly included approximately 1.4 million Indi-

ans, one million Bangladeshis, nearly 900,000 Pakistanis, 800,000 Filipinos, 750,000 Egyptians, 250,000 Palestinians, 150,000 Lebanese, 130,000 Sri Lankans, 40,000 Eritreans, and 25,000 Americans. Comprehensive statistics for the religious denominations of foreigners were not available; however, they included Muslims from the various branches and schools of Islam, Christians, Hindus and Buddhists. Approximately 90 percent of the Filipino community was Christian. There possibly were as many as one million Catholics in the country.

The majority of citizens were Sunni Muslims who predominantly adhere to the very strict Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, the strictest of Sunni Islam's four legal schools. In addition most Sunnis in the Kingdom subscribed to the teachings of Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab, an eighteenth Century Muslim scholar belonging to the Hanbali school. For this reason, these individuals were often referred to by others as "Wahhabis" or Tawhidis. Most citizens, however, did not describe themselves in these terms, preferring instead to say simply that they were "Muslims." Some conservative Muslims who attempt to follow the practice and example of the first generation of Muslims, known as the "sacred ancestors" or Salaf in Arabic, were often referred to as Salafis. It is important to note that the terms "Wahhabi" and Salafi have quite different meanings.

In January and February 2006, the country hosted more than two million Muslim pilgrims from around the world, and from all branches of Islam, for the annual Hajj.

The Shi'a Muslim minority (approximately two million persons) lived mostly in the Eastern Province, although a significant number also resided in Medina in the Western Province.

An estimated 700,000 Sulaimani Ismailis, a subgroup of Shi'a Islam, also lived in the country, primarily in Najran.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

There is no legal recognition or protection of religious freedom, and it is severely restricted in practice. Although millions of Muslims and non-Muslims did practice their faith on a daily basis, both Muslims whose beliefs do not conform to the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence and non-Muslims must practice their religion in private and are vulnerable to discrimination, harassment, and sometimes detention. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. Religious freedom is not recognized or protected under the Government's interpretations of Islamic laws, and basic religious freedoms are denied to all but those who adhere to the state-sanctioned version of Sunni Islam. Citizens are denied the freedom to choose or change their religion. The Government limits the practice of all but the officially sanctioned version of Islam and prohibits the public practice of other religions.

As custodian of Islam's two holiest sites in Mecca and Medina, the Government considers its legitimacy to rest largely on its interpretation and enforcement of Shari'a. The Basic Law provides that the Qur'an and the Sunna (tradition and sayings of Muhammad) constitute the country's Constitution. The Government generally follows the rigorously conservative interpretation of the Wahhabi branch of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence and discriminates against other branches of Islam. However, in a sign of liberalization, the Government also instructed judges to base their rulings on all four schools of Islamic jurisprudence, not just the Hanbali school and its Wahhabi branch. Neither the Government nor society in general accepts the concept of separation of religion and state.

The Basic Law establishes the system of government, rights of residents and citizens, and powers and duties of the Government. The judiciary bases its judgments largely on Shari'a, the traditional system of laws derived from the Qur'an and the Sunna. The Government claims that it permits Shi'a Muslims to use their own version of Shari'a to adjudicate cases limited to family law, inheritance, and endowment management. However, there were only two such Shi'a judges serving the entire Shi'a population. The Shari'a courts could and did overrule their judgments, and other government departments could choose not to implement their judgments.

During the reporting period, the Government announced September 23 as the Kingdom's National Day, the first secular holiday. The Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha religious feasts are the only other recognized national holidays. The Government again permitted public observance of the Shi'a holiday of Ashura in the eastern city of Qatif but did not permit it in other areas where Shi'a citizens resided, such as Al-Ahsa and Dammam.

Significant numbers of Sufis in the Western Province engaged in technically illegal practices such as celebrating the Mawlid, or Prophet's Birthday, without government interference.

During the reporting period, the Government made clear its policy that it permits private worship for all, including non-Muslims who gather in homes for religious practice, and confirmed that it would address violations of this right by government officials. However, the mutawwa'in sometimes did not respect this right in practice. Individuals whose right to private worship had been violated could address their grievances through the Ministry of the Interior, the Human Rights Commission, and when appropriate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the reporting period, there was no information on the number of claims filed or the Government's response to claims. Additionally, while customs officials and the mutawwa'in do not have the authority to confiscate personal private religious materials, in practice materials were confiscated from both Muslims and non-Muslims. It is the policy of the Government that when processing guest workers, its missions abroad are to inform them of their right to worship privately and possess personal religious materials, and where to file grievances should these rights be violated.

Islamic law considers Hindus to be polytheists; identification with polytheism is used to justify discrimination against Hindus, inter alia, in calculating accidental death or injury compensation. Christians and Jews, who are classified as "People of the Book," are also discriminated against, but to a lesser extent than Hindus. For example, according to the country's "Hanbali" interpretation of Shari'a, once fault is determined by a court, a Muslim male receives 100 percent of the amount of compensation determined, a male Jew or Christian receives 50 percent, and all others (including Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs) receive 1/16 of the amount a male Muslim may receive. Women's testimony is worth only half that of men, and a non-Muslim woman's testimony is worth less than that of a Muslim woman.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education continued to revise textbooks and educational curricula in an effort to remove intolerant references. The Government also established a High Commission for Education (HCE) to oversee the ongoing revision and updating of the educational system. The HCE reports to the king and is chaired by the crown prince. It includes 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 Supreme Council of the Ulema. The HCE's mandate includes oversight of the effort to improve textbooks, educational curricula, and teacher training, including the removal of intolerant text and the promotion of human rights.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Tolerated Islamic practice generally is limited to a branch of the Hanbali school of the Sunni branch of Islam founded by Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab, an eighteenth century Sunni religious leader, which is often referred to as "Wahhabism." Outside the country, most citizens do not use this term to describe themselves. Practices contrary to this interpretation, such as celebration of Muhammad's birthday and visits to the tombs of renowned Muslims, are forbidden. The Government prohibits the propagation of Islamic teachings that do not conform to the officially accepted interpretation of Islam. However, in practice, during the reporting period Muslims adhering to the non-Hanbali school were less restricted than in the past in expressing their religious beliefs.

During the reporting period, there was an increasing degree of public discussion of conservative religious traditions. Some writers criticized abuses committed by mutawwa'in. However, discussion of religious issues remained limited, and the Government placed temporary or permanent bans on some editors and writers of major local daily newspapers for publication of articles and cartoons critical of the religious establishment. In February 2006 the Government temporarily shut down a daily tabloid for reproducing one of the controversial cartoons of Muhammad that first appeared in a Danish daily newspaper. The Government suspended the paper for two weeks for violating sacred religious strictures.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs pays stipends to imams and others who work in Sunni mosques. A separate government committee within the Ministry of Islamic Affairs defines the qualifications of Sunni imams. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs also 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 Commission to Promote Virtue and Prevent Vice is a governmental entity that reports to the Royal Diwan. Its chairman has ministerial rank.

The Government did not finance construction or maintenance of Shi'a mosques. Shi'a who wished to build a new mosque must obtain the permission of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, 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 had 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.

The Government refused to approve construction or registration of hussainiyas, which serve as Shi'a community centers. Shi'a were forced to build areas in private homes that serve as hussainiyas, which did not enjoy legal recognition. These hussainiyas sometimes did not meet safety codes, and the lack of legal recognition made their long-term financing and continuity more difficult than it would otherwise be. The Government also did not approve construction of a Shi'a graveyard in Dammam.

The Government did not register the Hawza, or Shi'a religious seminary, in Al-Ahsa; it was instead registered as a private house. The government did not support the Hawza, sanction issuance of certificates to its graduates, or provide employment for its graduates, all of which it did for Sunni religious training institutions. There were no Shi'a members of the country's highest religious authority, the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars (Ulema). Religious training for all other religions is strictly prohibited.

Since the 2003 terrorist attacks in Riyadh, the Government has taken public measures to counter religious extremism. The Government continued its national dialogue initiative to promote dialogue and discussion among society and to combat extremism and terrorism. In February 2005 the Government hosted the first ever Counter-Terrorism International Conference for participants representing sixty-one countries and international organizations. The Government also continued sponsorship of antiterrorism and antiextremism public relations campaigns. The government-run television network continued broadcasting programs to combat extremist and terrorist ideology, and senior government and religious leaders, including the grand mufti, spoke out against extremism.

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs continued using the Internet to promote moderation and counter extremist's ideology. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs also monitored the majority of mosque sermons to ensure the ideas espoused are consistent with the government-sanctioned interpretation of Islam. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs claimed to monitor sermons as part of its ongoing efforts to fight extremism. The ministry also confirmed that its policy is to retrain imams to promote tolerance and combat extremist teachings. It also claims that it is reassigning or relieving imams who would not conform to retraining. During the reporting period, there were some instances where imams were relieved of their duties by the ministry. The Government stated that it barred foreign imams from leading worship during the most heavily attended prayer times, but there were instances when foreign imams delivered Friday sermons in the Eastern Province. Writers and other individuals who publicly criticized the official interpretation of Islam, including those who favored a more moderate interpretation than the Government's, risked mutawwa'in sanctions. Several journalists who wrote critically about the religious leadership or who questioned theological dogma were banned from writing or traveling abroad.

In April 2006, the Government arrested and detained a journalist for Riyadh's Al Shams newspaper. According to news reports, he was charged with "doubting the Islamic creed" and for "harboring destructive thoughts." The journalist had received death threats for his writings, according to news media. He was released after eleven days.

Conversion by a Muslim to another religion is widely considered to be apostasy, a crime punishable by death if the accused did not recant. There were no executions for apostasy during the reporting period, and there have been no reports of such executions for several years.

In March 2004, a schoolteacher who was reportedly teaching students about tolerance was convicted of blasphemy and was sentenced to 3 years imprisonment and 300 lashes.

In November 2005 a religious court convicted a high school teacher of blasphemy, sentencing him to more than 3 years and 750 lashes. The teacher reportedly was teaching his students about tolerance and challenging extremism. Both teachers were pardoned by King Abdullah in December 2005 after appealing their cases. Both trials received substantial international press coverage.

The Government prohibited public non-Muslim religious activities. Non-Muslim worshippers risked arrest, imprisonment, lashing, deportation, and sometimes torture for engaging in religious activity that attracts official attention. In principle the Government permitted non-Muslim foreigners, including non-Sunni Muslims, to worship privately in their homes. In October 2005 King Abdullah publicly stated "people are free to practice their faith in the privacy of their homes." However, the Government did not define "private worship," and this ambiguity, coupled with instances of arbitrary enforcement and detention, led many non-Muslims to worship

in fear of harassment and in such a way as to avoid discovery by police or mutawwa'in. During the reporting period, those detained for visible non-Muslim worship were deported, sometimes after being detained for a period of time during the investigation. In some cases in the past, those convicted were also sentenced to receive lashes prior to deportation. Anecdotal evidence suggested there was a decrease in both long-term detentions and deportations of non-Muslims for religious reasons. As a matter of policy, the mutawwa'in do not have the authority to conduct surveillance. However, there was an increase in reports of surveillance of non-Muslims by the mutawwa'in and informants. This perception of surveillance and targeting of leaders and organizers of non-Muslim religious groups by mutawwa'in effectively deterred many non-Muslims from gathering to hold private worship services in their homes. There was continued harassment by mutawwa'in, which either led to warnings, punishments, or short-term detentions of non-Muslims. As a matter of policy, the mutawwa'in are not authorized to implement punishments or detain individuals. Some former detainees reported occasional government harassment and surveillance following their release.

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 but did not prevent non-Muslims from gathering for private worship services. Catholics and Orthodox Christians, who require a priest on a regular basis to receive the sacraments required by their faith, were particularly affected.

Proselytizing by non-Muslims, including the distribution of non-Muslim religious materials such as Bibles, was illegal. The promotion of nonofficial interpretations of Islam was less restricted than it was in previous years. Muslims or non-Muslims wearing religious symbols in public that were considered idolatrous within the Hanbali school of Islam risk confrontation with mutawwa'in.

Some non-Muslim foreigners converted to Islam during their stay in the country. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs sponsored approximately 50 "Call and Guidance" centers employing approximately 500 persons to convert foreigners to Islam. The ministry also employed approximately fifty women to work in mosques and advocate for conversion to Islam. The state-owned media reported in May 2006 that in the last 10 years as many as 4,200 expatriates of various nationalities converted to Islam as a result of the activities of the Islamic Education Foundation. The report stated that approximately 40 percent of those who converted were women. The press often carried favorable articles about such conversions, including testimonials.

The Government required noncitizens to carry iqamas, or legal resident identity cards, which contained a religious designation for "Muslim" or "non-Muslim." There were reports that individual 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. Additionally, there were reports that mutawwa'in pressured employers and sponsors to reach verbal agreements with non-Muslim employees, who must promise that they will not participate in private or public non-Muslim worship services.

During the reporting period, authorities continued to permit a greater degree of freedom to Shi'a in the Eastern Province city of Qatif, overlooking religious practices and gatherings that were restricted or prevented in the past. However, in other areas with large Shi'a populations, such as al-Ahsa and Dammam, the authorities continued to restrict Shi'a religious practices. In January and February 2006 observances of Ashura took place in Qatif. Large groups of Shi'a gathered to hear Shi'a clerics speak at hussainiyas, to purchase books and other religious paraphernalia, and to participate in marches in commemoration of Imam Hussain's death. The Government imposed restrictions on public observances of Ashura in al-Ahsa, Dammam, and other areas where Shi'a lived, banning public marches, loudspeaker broadcast of clerics' lectures from hussainiyas, and, in some instances, gatherings within hussainiyas. The Government continued to exclude Shi'a perspectives from the state's extensive religious media and broadcast programming but appeared to have enforced more sporadically restrictions banning the importation and sale of Shi'a books and audio and video products.

Members of the Shi'a minority were subject to officially sanctioned political and economic discrimination, in addition to the religious and legal discrimination described above. Although Shi'a comprise 10 to 15 percent of the citizen population and approximately half of citizens in the Eastern Province (EP), Shi'a were underrepresented in senior government positions. There were no Shi'a governors, mayors, or ministry branch directors in the EP, and only three of the fifty-nine government-appointed municipal council members were Shi'a. The Shi'a were well-represented

in the elected portion of the municipal councils, however. The municipal council at Qatif was headed by an elected Shi'a. At the national level, there were only 4 Shi'a on the 150-member Majlis al-Shura.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that Shi'a faced considerable employment discrimination in the public and private sectors. While there were some Shi'a who 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 companies 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.

The Government discriminated against Shi'a in higher education 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 approximately 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. Shi'a principals were also underrepresented in Qatif, although it was reported that the Government had begun to appoint Shi'a principals at girls schools. Shi'a teachers were not permitted to teach certain courses in schools, such as history or religion, even in predominantly Shi'a areas. While government officials stated that textbook language with prejudicial, anti-Shi'a statements were removed, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that textbooks still contained anti-Shi'a and intolerant references. There were reports of prejudicial questions on exams. There were also reports that some teachers continued to use anti-Shi'a rhetoric, such as calling Shi'a students infidels or polytheists.

Under the provisions of Shari'a law as practiced in the country, judges may discount the testimony of nonpracticing Muslims or of individuals who do not adhere to the official interpretation of Islam. Testimony by Shi'a was often ignored in courts of law or was deemed to have less weight than testimony by Sunnis. despite official government statements that judges do not discriminate based on religion when hearing testimonies. In March 2006 a Sunni judge refused the testimony of Shi'a citizen Ala' Amin Al Sadeh. Al Sadeh filed a complaint with the Ministry of Justice and the National Society for Human Rights. At the end of the reporting period, it was not known whether a resolution was reached.

There were unconfirmed reports that at least fifty-seven Sulaimani Ismailis were still in jail following rioting in Najran in 2000. During the reporting period, there was no additional information on the status of these individuals. There were reports that the Government discriminated against Sulaimani Ismailis by prohibiting them from having their own religious books, allowing Sunni religious leaders to declare them unbelievers, denying them government employment or restricting them to lower-level jobs, relocating them from the southwest to other parts of the country, or encouraging them to emigrate.

Customs officials routinely opened mail and shipments to search for contraband, including Sunni printed material deemed incompatible with the conservative Hanbali tradition of Sunni Islam, Shi'a religious materials, and non-Muslim materials such as Bibles and religious videotapes. Such materials are vulnerable to confiscation and censorship, although rules appeared to be applied arbitrarily. The Government blocked access to some Internet websites with religious material that the Government considered offensive or sensitive.

Sunni Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools at all levels. Regardless of the Islamic tradition to which their families adhere, all public school children receive religious instruction that conforms to the conservative Hanbali tradition of Sunni Islam. Non-Muslim students in private schools are not required to study Islam. Private religious schools are not permitted for non-Muslims or for Muslims adhering to nonofficial interpretations of traditions of Islam.

During the reporting period, senior government officials announced plans to reform the educational system, including confirming plans to revise and reform textbooks to remove remaining intolerant references that disparage non-Sunni Muslims and non-Muslims or that promote hatred toward other religions or religious groups within one to two years. These plans also include revisions to the educational curricula and the training process for teachers to ensure that tolerance is promoted in the educational system. As a matter of policy, the Government confirmed that it is prohibiting the use of government channels or funds to publish or promote textbooks that contain intolerant references toward other religions and religious groups.

Public debate over reform in the country continued during the reporting period. In December 2005 the King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue convened the

fifth national dialogue forum, entitled, "We and the Other: A National Vision for Dealing with World Cultures." More than 700 men and women scholars, intellectuals, and government officials met to discuss proposing a national vision paper for citizens' interaction with other societies and their religions. The national vision paper emphasized adherence to Islamic values and customs and stressed respect for others' beliefs and openness to other cultures. King Abdullah, then the crown prince, began the national dialogue initiative in 2003 in response to calls for real and practical reform in the kingdom. Building on the four previous forums, the December session was the culmination of thirteen preparatory meetings held in the country between April and November 2005 where scholars and civil society members, both men and women, discussed political reform, religious tolerance, and the role of women and youth in the country. Additionally, preparatory meetings for the Sixth National Dialogue Forum, entitled "Education: Reality and Development Methods," were held in May 2006 to address education curricula reform.

During the reporting period, the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), the first human rights NGO officially licensed by the Government in March 2004, continued to address some human rights violations, although not specifically religious freedom issues. From March 2004 to February 2006, it reportedly processed 5,000 "human rights" cases. Additionally, the Government formed the Human Rights Commission (HRC) in September 2005 to address human rights infractions, including violations of religious freedom. The HRC is also mandated to spread human rights awareness in the country, including by training police and security forces on protecting human rights. The king issued a decree that ministries had three weeks to respond to a complaint filed by the HRC. Most complaints filed with the HRC involved alleged violations by mutawwa'in. At the end of the period covered by this report, the board of the HRC had not been established, and the HRC was not completely operational.

Abuses of Freedom of Religion

The Government continued to commit abuses of religious freedom; however, reports of abuses often were difficult or impossible to corroborate. Fear and the consequent secrecy surrounding any non-Muslim 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 generally were closed to the public, despite provisions in the 2002 Criminal Procedural Law that allowed some court proceedings to be open.

During the reporting period, there was no additional information on the case of a dissident Sunni religious scholar who the Government accused of writing literature that questioned the Islamic establishment's interpretation of the Sunna (the sayings and acts of Muhammad). The Government reportedly had banned him from writing and traveling for several years.

During the reporting period, the government reinstated the travel privileges of a university professor who was banned from teaching and traveling during the last reporting period for criticizing the Government's discriminatory policies against Shi'a. The university professor was allowed to resume teaching in 2005.

In 2003 the press reported a raid in the Al Jouf region, where sixteen Sufis were arrested for possession and distribution of books, videos, and brochures promoting Sufism. During the reporting period, there was no additional information confirming the raid or reporting on the status of these individuals.

In June and November 2005, the Government temporarily shut down a weekly majlis, or gathering, held by a Sufi sheikh who adheres to the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence. The majlis reconvened shortly after.

There was no additional information on unconfirmed reports that a number of Shi'a remained in detention.

There continued to be instances of detaining and deporting non-Muslims for religious reasons.

In September 2004 seven Filipino Christian leaders were arrested and detained when mutawwa'in raided a religious service. All were released within one month, but mutawwa'in reportedly put pressure on their employers to deport them. Six had been deported by July 2005.

In November 2004, Indian Christian Brian O'Connor was deported after being detained for seven months for religious reasons.

In February 2005, mutawwa'in raided a Filipino Christian worship service in Riyadh; those detained and arrested were released within hours of the raid.

In March 2005 mutawwa'in arrested Indian Christian Samkutty Varghese and confiscated religious materials he was carrying. Varghese was released in July 2005. There were additional reports of arrests in May 2005 of at least eight Indian Protes-

tant leaders following Varghese's arrest, purportedly because he carried information listing other Christians in the kingdom. Six of the eight were released and two remained in the kingdom. Further details on the status of the two who remained were not known.

In April 2005, according to newspaper reports and independent sources, at least twenty Pakistani Christians were arrested during a mutawwa'in raid on a Christian service. Most or all were released the same day.

Also in April 2005, three Ethiopian and two Eritrean Christians were arrested in Riyadh during a raid on a private service. All five were released after a month in detention.

During the reporting period, there were 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. In April 2006 the Government arrested a Catholic priest from India who was presiding over a service in Dammam. He was released on April 7 and left the country the next day.

Also in April 2006 the mutawwa'in reportedly arrested a female Shi'a student in Riyadh, allegedly for proselytizing other students. She was released several days later and allowed to return to her family.

In June 2006 four East African Christians were arrested while leading a private worship ceremony. At the end of the period covered by this report, they were scheduled for deportation.

During the reporting period, there also were reports of surveillance of Christian religious services by security personnel.

"Magic" was widely believed in and sometimes practiced. However, under Shari'a the practice of magic was regarded as the worst form of polytheism and was severely punished. There were an unknown number of detainees held in prison on the charge of "sorcery," including the practice of "black magic" or "witchcraft." During the reporting period, the local press reported several cases of arrests of foreigners and citizens for practicing "sorcery." The raids were reported to be part of a campaign to locate illegal residents.

Mutawwa'in practices and incidents of abuse varied widely in different regions of the country. Reports of incidents were most numerous in the central Nejd region, which includes the capital Riyadh. In certain areas, both mutawwa'in and religious vigilantes acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, apprehended, and detained citizens and foreigners. The Government requires mutawwa'in to follow established procedures and to offer instruction in a polite manner. However, mutawwa'in did not always comply with these requirements and the Government did not take legal or police action against mutawwa'in who violated these regulations, even in cases where they used physical violence against detainees.

Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior included closing commercial establishments during the five daily prayer observances, insisting upon compliance with conservative dress standards, and dispersing gatherings in public places. Mutawwa'in enforcement of strict standards of social behavior was more pronounced during the month of Ramadan. Mutawwa'in reproached foreign women for failure to observe strict dress codes, particularly for failure to wear headscarves, and detained men and women found together who were not married or closely related. In the past, the press reported that mutawwa'in warned shopkeepers not to sell New Year's or Christmas gifts or decorations. The warning also reminded employees not to allow their staff to celebrate either holiday openly. In February 2004, the grand mufti restated a previously issued fatwa that declared Valentine's Day a "pagan Christian holiday" that could not be celebrated publicly. Mutawwa'in banned shopkeepers from selling Valentine's Day gifts and decorations and forbade vendors from selling roses five days prior to and following February 14.

Mutawwa'in had the authority to confront persons for violations of strict standards of proper dress and behavior and to apprehend individuals committing a crime, but must immediately hand suspects over to the police. However, they sometimes detained people for more than twenty-four hours before delivering them to the police. The interior minister announced this policy, but no information was available on whether the Government had taken measures to hold accountable mutawwa'in who broke the rules. Procedures required that a police officer accompany mutawwa'in at the time of arrest. Mutawwa'in generally complied with this requirement, but there were cases during the year in which mutawwa'in violated this requirement. As a matter of policy, mutawwa'in must also have a warrant and be accompanied by a police officer to enter a private residence; however, there were several reported cases where mutawwa'in did not produce a warrant before entering the premises. Mutawwa'in could not conduct investigations or allow unpaid volunteers to accompany official patrols; however, there were cases during the year in

which unofficial mutawwa'in harassed individuals and used noncitizen informants to gather information for investigations of other non-Muslims. During the reporting period, the Government issued a decree that all members of the mutawwa'in must wear an official photo identification badge, and all future members of the mutawwa'in must be trained at a special institute. Current members of the mutawwa'in were to undergo retraining. By the end of the reporting period, there were no known instances where mutawwa'in were held accountable for violating government policies.

In May 2006 the Government issued a decree to all thirteen provinces stating that all cases involving alleged harassment by the mutawwa'in would be transferred for investigation to the Board of Investigation and Prosecution, an independent board in each province that answers to each region's governor. In the past, the mutawwa'in had conducted independent, internal investigations of complaints against it. The decree also reiterated that the role of the mutawwa'in ended with the apprehension of individuals accused of crimes and that the mutawwa'in must immediately hand them over to the police.

In general, non-Muslim, non-Western religious communities must exercise extreme caution when practicing their religions. The press reported in March 2005 that mutawwa'in raided a makeshift Hindu shrine in Riyadh, destroying its temple and forcing worshippers to cease their activities. The Government reportedly deported three worshippers.

During the reporting period, there continued to be instances in which mosque preachers, who are paid government stipends, used anti-Jewish, anti-Christian, and anti-Shi'a language in their sermons. Although this language has declined in frequency since the Government began encouraging moderation following the 2003 terror attacks, there continued to be instances in which mosque speakers prayed for the death of Jews and Christians, including from the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reports that terrorists targeted victims based on their religion. During the reporting period, the security forces conducted a number of raids on suspected al-Qa'ida cells in the Kingdom. Seven members of the security forces were killed during firefights with suspected terrorists. Terrorists also unsuccessfully attacked an oil facility in February 2006. In May 2006, a local man fired shots at a foreign consulate in Jeddah. No personnel were injured during the shooting and the individual was arrested and detained by the security forces. During the previous reporting period, terrorists killed more than thirty foreigners and citizen civilians, including five employees of a foreign consulate in Jeddah in December. More than forty members of security forces were also killed while combating terrorists. The terrorist attacks consisted of kidnappings, targeted shootings, bombings, and beheadings.

Forced Religious Conversion

Under the law, children of male citizens are considered Muslim, regardless of the country or the religious tradition in which they have been raised. 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 faiths. Women who marry citizens must convert to Islam. There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States during the reporting period.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Government identified and confirmed its policies with regard to a wide range of religious practice and tolerance issues. Senior government officials made efforts to improve the climate of tolerance toward other religious groups and within Islam.

In October 2005, in his first U.S. television interview since becoming king, King Abdullah stated that "people are free to practice their faith in the privacy of their homes." In December 2005 King Abdullah hosted a ministerial summit of the OIC, which produced the communiqué "A Ten Year Plan of Action for the Muslim World." The king inaugurated the conference with a call for moderation, tolerance, rejection of extremist violence, and reform of educational programs (including textbooks and curricula). The communiqué included provisions calling for religious tolerance, improved human rights standards, and state accountability.

There was an improvement in press freedom during the reporting period, and discussions of religious issues were more open. Additionally, increased press freedom permitted journalists to criticize abuses by the mutawwa'in publicly. The press re-

ported on debates in the Majlis al-Shura that focused on whether individuals must be Muslim to attain citizenship and included opinions on both sides of the issue.

The Government also took limited measures to remove what it deemed to be disparaging references to other religious traditions from educational curricula.

Senior leaders, including the king, the crown prince, the foreign minister, the ambassador to the United States, the grand mufti, the imam and khateeb of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the imam and khateeb of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, and imams in mosques in various parts of the kingdom continued to call for tolerance and moderation. In May 2004, the deputy minister of Islamic affairs was reported as saying that the country protects non-Muslims but does not plan to expand freedom of worship. In May 2006, an imam at the Grand Mosque in Mecca called for increased tolerance of other religious faiths.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

As a deeply conservative and devout Muslim society, there is intense pressure within the country to conform to societal norms.

The conservative religious leadership also exerted pressure on the state to adhere strictly to its interpretation of Islam. The Government stated that in 2003 it stepped up efforts to combat religious extremism by firing several hundred prayer leaders and beginning retraining programs for both imams and other mosque employees. In July 2005, the news media reported that the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in Najran fired 17 imams working in mosques in the region and ordered another 132 to attend legal training courses. During the reporting period, there were numerous instances where imams were fired for extremist rhetoric.

There were several media reports that individuals who were openly critical of the religious establishment were often harassed by the mutawwa'in and received death threats from religious extremists.

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.

Relations between Muslim citizens and foreign Muslims were generally good. Each year the country welcomes between two and three million Muslim pilgrims from all over the world and representing all branches of Islam, who visit the country to perform the Hajj and Umra.

Anti-Semitic editorial comments appeared in the print and electronic media. For example, references supporting the idea of "Jewish control over the world," and to the Protocols of the Elders of Zion appeared in the newspaper Ar-Riyadh on March 6, 2006. Cartoons typically used classic anti-Semitic imagery directed against the actions of Israel as a "Zionist" state, particularly in regard to treatment of Palestinians. At times, there were questions raised in the media on whether modern Christians and Jews should be considered "people of the book" and thus due the respect required by the Qur'an. In December 2005, according to an NGO, Sheikh Abdul al-Aziz Fawzan al-Fawzan, a professor of Islamic law at Al-Imam University, urged on Al-Majd television a nonracist, compassionate, "hatred" toward infidels that would guide and reform them.

NGOs have reported examples of hate speech in educational textbooks and, in particular noted that religious textbooks emphasized intolerance and hatred of religious traditions, especially Christianity and Judaism. Officials claimed to have revised textbooks to remove content disparaging religions other than Islam. However, many recently published textbooks still contained language that was intolerant of Judaism, Christianity, and the Shi'a tradition. The Government confirmed that it is revising and updating the textbooks to ensure that tolerance is promoted.

There was societal discrimination against Shi'a, particularly in the school system. Some teachers of Islam told their students that Shi'a practices were un-Islamic and that Shi'a students must follow Sunni traditions to be true Muslims. There were reports that teachers told their students that Shi'a were not Muslims, but rather were kaffirs (unbelievers). Outside the school system, there were reports that eggs were thrown at houses of Shi'a living in predominantly Sunni areas and that some Sunnis would not socialize, or permit their children to be friends with Shi'a.

In certain areas, religious vigilantes unaffiliated with the Government and acting on their own harassed, assaulted, battered, arrested, and detained citizens and foreigners.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed 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. This made it possible to identify and confirm a number of key policies that the Government is pursuing and will continue to pursue for the purposes of promoting greater freedom for religious practice and increased tolerance for religious groups. 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 conservative Hanbali tradition 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 September 2005, the Secretary of State redesignated Saudi Arabia as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). 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. 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.

The status of respect for religious freedom improved slightly during the period covered by this report in that the Government eased restrictions on public, state-sanctioned expressions of Islam. The Government continued to monitor the activities of all groups, including religious groups, and discourage proselytism, which it deems a threat to the relations among religious groups. The Government also considers the Jehovah's Witnesses a "politically motivated Zionist organization."

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were occasional reports of minor tensions between religious groups, some attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 71,498 square miles and a population of 18 million. Sunni Muslims represented approximately 74 percent of the population (approximately 12.6 million persons). Other Muslim groups, including Alawi, Ismailis, and Shi'a, together constituted an estimated 13 percent of the population (approximately 2.2 million persons). The Druze accounted for an estimated 3 percent of the population (approximately 500 thousand persons). Various Christian denominations made up the remaining 10 percent of the population (approximately 1.7 million. persons). The great majority of Christians belonged to the Eastern groups that have existed in the country since the earliest days of Christianity. The main Eastern groups belonged to the autonomous Orthodox churches, the Uniate churches, which recognize the Roman Catholic Pope, and the independent Nestorian Church. There was a small Yazidi population. There were approximately forty Jews. It was difficult to obtain precise population estimates for religious sub-groupings due to government sensitivity to sectarian demographics.

The largest Christian denomination was the Greek Orthodox Church, known in the country as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The Syrian Orthodox Church is notable for its use of a Syriac liturgy. Most citizens of Armenian origin belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church, which uses an Armenian liturgy. The largest Uniate church in the country was the Greek Catholic Church. Other Uniate denominations included the Maronite Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, and the Chaldean Catholic Church, which derives from the Nesto-

rian Church. Protestant Christian denominations included Baptist and Mennonite. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) was also present.

Sunni Muslims were present throughout the country. Christians tended to be urbanized, and most lived in Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Lattakia, although significant numbers lived in the Hasaka governorate in the northeast. A majority of the Alawis lived in the Lattakia governorate. A significant majority of the Druze population resided in the rugged Jabal al-Arab region in the southeast, and most were located in the town of Suweida. The few remaining Jews were concentrated in Damascus and Aleppo. Yazidis were found primarily in the northeast.

Foreign missionary groups were present but operated discreetly.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government discourages public proselytism and carefully monitors groups it considers to practice militant Islam. 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.

All religions and orders must register with the Government, which monitors fundraising and requires permits for all religious and nonreligious group meetings, except for worship. The registration process can be complicated and lengthy, but the Government usually allows groups to operate informally while awaiting the Government's response.

Recognized religious groups, including all governmentally-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 the state. The Government generally refrains from involvement in strictly religious matters and religious groups tend not to participate in internal political affairs. During the reporting period, the Government increased its support for the practice and study of government-sanctioned, moderate forms of Islam.

During the reporting period, the Government allowed a greater 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 and during the controversy over the publication of cartoons depicting Muhammad in European newspapers.

During the reporting period the Government sometimes encouraged negative—even violent—expressions of Islamic religious sentiment, at least in part to curry favor with the Syrian Sunni majority. The clearest example of this occurred on February 4, 2006, when the Government allowed Muslim groups to demonstrate publicly against the publication of the cartoons, and later failed to control a mob of several thousand Muslim protesters that attacked and set fire to the building housing the Danish, Swedish, and Chilean embassies, and later set fire to the Norwegian Embassy.

In April 2006, MP and moderate Muslim cleric Mohammed Habash addressed the officers at the Higher Military Academy, an event described by press sources as the first such invitation since the 1963 rise of the Ba'ath Party to power. In May 2006, the state-owned al-Thawra newspaper began a new section called "Religion and Life," which focused exclusively on Islamic views and fatwas. Syrian state radio also began broadcasting the dawn and afternoon Muslim prayers, in addition to its traditional broadcast of noon prayers.

In April 2006, President Bashar al-Asad signed a decree permitting the establishment of a Shari'a (Islamic Law) faculty at Aleppo University. In the same month, the Government also announced a decision, the first of its kind, to license three private Islamic banks. In November 2005, Muslim groups successfully lobbied government ministries to clamp down on the activities of two secular nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In the first case, the NGO distributed a book that challenged the practice of Muslim women wearing the hijab (headscarf). In the second case, another NGO attempted to conduct research on the use of Shari'a as the basis for many personal status laws applicable to all citizens, regardless of religion.

The Government selects moderate Muslims for religious leadership positions and is intolerant of and suppresses extremist forms of Islam. Two moderate Islamists were elected in the March 2003 elections and serve as independent members of parliament. In July 2005, the Government appointed Sheikh Ahmed Baderedin Hassoun, the Grand Mufti of Aleppo, as the new Grand Mufti of Damascus. Sheikh Hassoun is known for his encouragement of religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Since being appointed to his new role, Sheikh Hassoun has called 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.

The Government generally does not prohibit links by its citizens with coreligionists in other countries or with an international hierarchy; however, it prohibits contact between the Jewish community and Jews in Israel. Western Christmas, Orthodox and Western Easter, as well as four Muslim religious holidays (Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, the Islamic New Year, and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad) are official national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 1964, the Government banned Jehovah's Witnesses and branded it a "politically motivated Zionist organization." The Government bans Witnesses from employment in the civil service, receiving religious literature by post, and traveling abroad. They are also prohibited from holding worship services; however, individual members of Jehovah's Witnesses continued to practice their faith privately.

In 1963, the Government banned membership in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and later made affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood punishable by death under the auspices of Law 49 of 1980.

Proselytism is not prohibited by civil law; however, the Government discouraged such activity which it deems a threat to the relations among religious groups. Foreign missionaries were present but operated discreetly. In the past, some proselytizers were prosecuted for "posing a threat to the relations among religious groups." Most charges of this kind carried sentences of imprisonment from five years to life, although often such sentences were reduced to one or two years. There were no reported cases of any prosecution on this charge during the last four years.

The security services were constantly alert for any possible political threat to the State, and all groups, religious and nonreligious, were subject to surveillance and monitoring by government security services. The Government considered militant Islam in particular a threat to the regime and followed closely the practice of its adherents. The Government has allowed many mosques to be built; however, it monitored and controlled sermons and often closed mosques between prayers.

The Government primarily cited tense relations with Israel as the reason for barring Jewish citizens from employment in the civil service, serving in the armed forces, and for exempting them from military service obligations. Jews were the only religious minority group whose passports and identity cards noted their religion. They must obtain the permission of the security services before traveling abroad. Jews also faced extra scrutiny from the Government when applying for licenses, deeds, or other government papers. The Jewish community is prohibited from sending historical Torahs abroad under a law against exporting any of the country's historical and cultural treasures. This created a serious problem for the dwindling Jewish community concerned for the preservation of its religious texts.

Government policy officially disavows sectarianism of any kind; however, in the case of President Asad's Alawi Muslim group, religion can be a factor in determining career opportunities. For example, Alawis held dominant positions in the security services and military that were disproportionate to their percentage of the population.

In keeping with the Government's secular policy, the military did not have a chaplain corps, members of the military did not have direct access to religious or spiritual support, and soldiers were expected not to express their faith overtly during work hours. For example, Muslims were discouraged from praying while on duty. Religious minorities, with the exception of Jews, were represented among the senior officer corps.

Religious groups are subject to their respective religious laws on marriage and divorce.

For Muslims, personal status law on divorce is based on Shari'a, and some of its provisions as interpreted discriminate against women. The legal standard for men to be granted a divorce is much lower than that for women. For example, husbands may claim adultery as grounds for divorce, but wives face more difficulty in presenting the same case. If a woman requests a divorce from her husband, she may not be entitled to child support, alimony, and the return of her dowry in some instances.

All citizens are subject to the Shari'a-based personal status laws regulating child custody, inheritance, and adoption. In the case of divorce, a woman loses the right to custody of her sons when they reach the age of thirteen and her daughters when they reach the age of fifteen, 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.

Inheritance for all citizens is also based on Shari'a. Accordingly, women usually are granted half of the inheritance share of male heirs; however, Shari'a mandates that male heirs provide financial support to the female relatives who inherit less. For example, a brother 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. Polygyny is legal but is practiced only by a minority of Muslim men.

All schools officially were government-run and nonsectarian, although in practice some schools were run by Christian and Druze minorities. There was mandatory religious instruction in schools for all religious groups, with government-approved teachers and curriculums. Religious instruction was provided on Islam and Christianity only, and courses were divided into separate classes for Muslim and Christian students. Groups that participated in Islamic courses include Sunni, Shi'a, Alawi, Ismaili, Yazidi, and Druze. In the past, Jews had a separate primary school that offered religious instruction on Judaism and other traditional subjects; however, the school closed in 2004 due to the dwindling size of the Jewish community. Although Arabic was the official language in public schools, the Government permitted the teaching of Armenian, Hebrew, Syriac (Aramaic), and Chaldean in some schools, on the basis that these were "liturgical languages." There was no mandatory religious study at the university level.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were reports that the Government used torture against alleged Islamists held in detention. For example, family members of forty-five accused Islamists from the villages of Qatana, al-Otaiba, and al-Tal reported to human rights organizations during the year that their relatives had been tortured at the time of their arrests in 2004.

During the reporting period, human rights organizations documented the arrest of at least seventy persons for alleged ties to Islamist groups.

On February 7, 2006, Tartous-based journalist Adel Mahfouz was arrested by Syrian authorities after publishing an article encouraging dialogue between Muslims and the cartoon artists who created caricatures of Muhammad for the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. He was released on bail March 12, and at the end of the reporting period no criminal court date had been set for him.

The Government continued to hold an unknown number of members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists as political detainees and prisoners. Their arrests and, in some cases, convictions, were motivated primarily by the Government's view of militant Islamists as potential threats to regime stability. Human rights groups estimated that at least several hundred alleged Islamists were detained in prisons, security service detention centers, or other secret detention facilities.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 and property damage against Jews in Damascus perpetrated by individuals not associated with the Government. In 2004 and early 2005, there were reports of such harassment and there was evidence that local police and other government officials did not respond aggressively to these incidents.

Government officials occasionally used radio and television programming, news articles, and other mass media to condone anti-Semitic material. Anti-Israel material was widespread, some of which carried anti-Semitic overtones. For example, in January 2006, the government-owned al-Thawra newspaper published an article suggesting that the Government of Israel had genetically engineered the avian flu virus in order to damage "genes carried only by Arabs" and thus "to realize the Zionist goal of harming the Arabs."

On November 8, 2005, government-owned Syrian TV broadcast an interview with the deputy minister of Religious Endowments (Awqaf) in which he stated that Syria serves as "the last line of defense" against "Zionist plots which aim to put on the throne of the Middle East the descendants of...those whom the Koran called the descendants of apes and pigs."

On November 24, 2005, former National Director of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke, participated in a mass solidarity protest in Damascus, and his speech was aired on Syrian national television. He praised President Bashar al-Asad, declaring, "It is not just the West Bank of Palestine...that [is] occupied by Zionists, but Washington, D.C., and New York, and London."

Tishrin editorialist, Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, wrote in a July 31, 2005, editorial that "Syria is targeted by an intensive media campaign managed and financed by Zionist circles." Tishrin also regularly used anti-Semitic caricatures to represent Israel in editorial cartoons.

In January 2005, a new edition of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion was published by the Syrian publishing company Dar al-Awail, which credited the Ministry of Information with approving the text. In 2003, an independent production company created and filmed an anti-Semitic program inside the country. Its theme centered on the alleged conspiracy of the "Elders of Zion" to orchestrate both world wars and manipulate world markets to create Israel. The program was not aired in the country but was shown elsewhere.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

A November 3, 2005, presidential decree granted amnesty to 190 political prisoners, coinciding with the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. Most freed prisoners were Islamists and had been long-term detainees.

In February 2005, the president ordered the release of fifty-five political prisoners who had spent up to twenty years in jail. Most freed prisoners were being held for, or had been convicted of, belonging to an Islamist group.

The late Grand Mufti's son Salah Kuftaro and his Abu Nur Islamic Institute continued to engage in a wide variety of activities promoting Christian-Muslim understanding. In May 2005, the Council of Middle East Churches visited Kuftaro to discuss Christian-Muslim understanding and future prospects. In November 2004, Muslim and Christian leaders participated in a conference on the subject, part of which was held at the Abu Nur Institute.

In 2005 and 2006, an American rabbi visited the country three times. During his May 2005 visit, he spoke with both Christian and Muslim religious leaders about the value of religion in building a tolerant and caring society. In May 2006, at the invitation of the Grand Mufti, he delivered a speech at an Aleppo mosque to a group of over three thousand Muslims.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were occasional reports of minor tensions between religious groups mainly attributable to economic rivalries rather than religious affiliation.

In July 2005, sectarian strife broke out in the cities of Misyaf and Qadmous in clashes between members of the Alawite and Ismaili sects. In Misyaf, rioting broke out after a dispute between Alawite and Ismaili bus drivers. In Qadmous, a group of Alawites looted and destroyed shops in a predominantly Ismaili area.

There was little evidence of societal discrimination or violence against religious minorities.

Societal conventions, and religious and theological proscriptions, made conversions relatively rare, especially Muslim-to-Christian conversions. In many cases, societal pressure forced those who undertook such conversions to relocate within the country or leave the country to practice their new religion openly.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government has limited contact with the Government. 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 proselytizing by non-Muslims. It restricts the wearing of Islamic headscarves (hijab) in government offices and it discourages women from wearing the hijab on public streets and at certain public gatherings.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 63,170 square miles, and a population of ten million. Approximately 99 percent of the population was Muslim. There was no reliable data on the number of practicing Muslims. There was a small indigenous "Maraboutic" Muslim community that belongs to spiritual brotherhoods known as "turuq;" however, there were no statistics regarding its size. Reliable sources reported that many members of these brotherhoods left the country shortly after independence when the Government appropriated their religious buildings and land (and those of Islamic foundations). During annual Ramadan festivals, members of these brotherhoods provided public cultural entertainment by performing religious dances. There were also approximately 150 members of the Baha'i Faith.

The Christian community, composed of foreign residents and a small group of native-born citizens of European or Arab descent, numbered approximately twenty-five thousand and was dispersed throughout the country. According to church leaders, the practicing Christian population was approximately two thousand and included a few hundred native-born citizens who have converted to Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church operated twelve churches, nine schools, several libraries, and two clinics. There were approximately 500 practicing Catholics. In addition to holding religious services, the Catholic Church also freely organized cultural activities and performed charitable work throughout the country. In 2005 the Government permitted the reopening of a Catholic church in Djerba following requests from European nations with substantial tourist travel to the country. The Russian Orthodox Church had approximately one hundred practicing members and operated a church in Tunis and another in Bizerte. The French Reform Church maintained a church in Tunis, with a congregation of approximately 140 primarily foreign members. The Anglican Church had a church in Tunis with several hundred predominantly foreign members. There was a small Seventh-day Adventist community with approximately fifty members. The thirty-member Greek Orthodox Church maintained three churches (in Tunis, Sousse, and Djerba). On an occasional basis, Catholic and Protestant religious services were also held in several other locations, such as private residences. There were also approximately fifty Jehovah's Witnesses, of whom approximately half were foreign residents and half are native-born citizens. The Government allowed a small number of foreign religious charitable nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to operate and provide social services.

Judaism was the country's third largest religion with approximately 1,500 members. One-third lived in and around the capital and is descended predominantly from Italian and Spanish immigrants. The remainder lived on the island of Djerba where the Jewish community dates back 2,500 years.

Foreign Christian missionary organizations and groups were present in the country; however, they were not permitted to proselytize.

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. It restricts the wearing of the hijab in government offices and it 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 discriminate 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 also partially subsidizes the Jewish community.

The following Islamic holidays are considered national holidays: Eid el-Kebir, the Islamic New Year, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and Eid Es-Sighir.

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 fourteen churches "serving all sects" of the country, the Government recognizes land grants signed by the Bey of Tunis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that allow other churches to operate. By the end of the reporting period the Government had not acted on a request for registration of a Jewish religious organization in Djerba; however, the group continued to operate and perform religious activities and charitable work unobstructed.

The Government allows the Jewish community freedom of worship and pays the salary of the Grand Rabbi. It also provides security for all synagogues and partially subsidizes restoration and maintenance costs for some. In 1999 the president of the Provisional Committee of the Jewish community and his board of governors submitted registration papers to the Ministry of Interior for permanent registration as the Association of the Jewish Community of Tunisia. Although the Government has not registered the association by the end of the reporting period, the president and board of governors continued to meet weekly. During the reporting period, the Government permitted the association to operate and perform religious activities and charity work unhindered. According to the law, an NGO that has filed an application to register may operate freely while the Government processes its application. If the Government does not reject the application within ninety days, the NGO is automatically registered.

The Government permits the Jewish community to operate private religious schools and allows Jewish children on the island of Djerba to split their academic day between secular public schools and private religious schools. The Government also encourages Jewish emigres and other Jewish pilgrims to return for the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the historic El-Ghriba Synagogue on Djerba. There also was a small private Jewish school in Tunis.

The Government promoted interfaith understanding by sponsoring regular conferences and seminars on religious tolerance and facilitating and promoting the annual Jewish pilgrimage to the El-Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, celebrated on the Jewish holiday of Lag B'Omar. In October 2005, the religious affairs minister gave a lecture at ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally party headquarters on "Tunisia's efforts in support for the dialogue between religions." In January 2006, the country hosted an international conference on "Human Civilizations and Cultures: From Dialogue to Alliance," organized by the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization, which included discussions on religious tolerance. In April 2006, the Ministry of Religious Affairs introduced a university program on intercivilizational dialogue between all major world religious groups.

In September 2005, the minister of foreign affairs participated in a conference promoting Islamic-Jewish dialogue with the World Jewish Congress and the European Jewish Congress. In February, the European Jewish Congress voted to make the country a member of its organization. The European Jewish Congress is affiliated with the World Jewish Congress and is made up of leaders of forty-one European and North African communities.

In 2005, the Government announced it would help clean up the rundown Jewish cemetery of Tunis, a former Hebraic school would be restored and made into an arts training center for the handicapped, and that travel restrictions on Israelis would be eliminated. In the past, passport restrictions, as well as concerns about possible retribution, discouraged Israelis from visiting, despite the fact that the Government has encouraged foreign Jewish visitors to participate in the Ghriba pilgrimage. The number of Jewish pilgrims to Ghriba in May represented a dramatic increase over previous years; in 2006 estimates ranged between three thousand and four thousand. According to local Jewish leaders, approximately 500 of these pilgrims were Israeli citizens traveling under the recently relaxed travel policies.

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. Baha'is presence in the country dates back a century and their number was estimated at 200.

The Government does not permit the establishment of political parties on the basis of religion, and it refused to register the Islamist party An-Nahdha. In the past, it prosecuted suspected party members on these grounds. The Government maintained tight surveillance over Islamists. The Government refused to issue passports to a number of alleged Islamists. The Government maintained that only the courts possess the power to revoke passports; however, reports indicated that it rarely observed this separation of powers in politically sensitive cases.

Notwithstanding the reopening of the church in Djerba mentioned above, the Government did not permit other Christian groups to establish new churches, and proselytizing by non-Muslims was viewed as disturbing the public order, and thus illegal. Foreign Christian missionary organizations and groups were present, 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 harassed converts to discourage conversion. There were reports of Christian citizens being detained by police and government security officials and questioned about their conversion to Christianity. There was one report that a Christian citizen was told by a local security official that it was illegal to be a Christian, and threatened with imprisonment. There were reports that on occasion when seeking renewal of passports, the process was inexplicably delayed for some Christians, although passports were subsequently issued.

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 three days in advance and to submit lists of all meeting participants to the Ministry of Interior.

Religious groups are subjected to the same restrictions on freedom of speech and the press as secular groups. In January, the president signed a law lifting "dépôt légal," which had been a requirement that the Government approve all locally-produced printed material prior to publication or distribution. For publications printed abroad, distributors must deposit copies with the chief prosecutor and other ministries prior to their public release. Although Christian groups reported that they were able to distribute previously approved religious publications in European languages without difficulty, they said the Government generally did not grant permission to publish and distribute Arabic-language Christian texts. Moreover, the Government allowed only established churches to distribute religious publications to parishioners. It considered other groups' distribution of religious documents to be a "threat to public order," and thus illegal.

The Government restricts the wearing of the hijab in government offices, and there were reports of police requiring women to remove their hijabs 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 characterized the hijab as a "garment of foreign origin having a partisan connotation" and restricted its use in public institutions to "observe impartiality required of officials in their professional relations with others." There also were frequent reports that police sometimes harassed or detained men with beards whom the Government suspected because of their "Islamic" appearance.

According to human rights lawyers, the Government regularly questioned some Muslims who were observed praying frequently in mosques. The authorities instructed imams to espouse government social and economic programs during prayer times in mosques. In December, 2005 the religious affairs minister told members of the Chamber of Advisors that mosques were open only for prayers and that those who used mosques to "spread ideologies" would be prosecuted.

Islamic religious education is mandatory in public schools, but the religious curriculum for secondary school students also includes the history of Judaism and Christianity. The Zeitouna Qur'anic School is part of the Government's national university system, which is otherwise secular.

Customary law based on Shari'a forbids Muslim women from marrying outside their religion although 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 judges generally ruled that marriages performed abroad were legal, on rare occasions judges declared them void in the country. The Government does not permit the marriage of Muslim women to non-Muslim men inside the country; however, if a man converts to Islam, he may marry a Muslim woman. Muslim men and non-Muslim women who are married 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 provided 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 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.

The Government assisted in cleaning up the rundown Jewish cemetery in Tunis; government employees were responsible for lawn upkeep of the cemetery, although the Jewish community had responsibility for the restoration of tombs and monuments and large structural rehabilitation.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

In 2006, credible sources estimated that approximately 200 persons were serving prison sentences because of their suspected membership in the illegal Islamist political party An-Nahdha or for their alleged Islamist sympathies; however, there were no reports of cases in which the Government arrested or detained persons based solely on their religious beliefs.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

According to press reports and eyewitnesses, approximately one hundred students shouted anti-Israel and anti-Semitic slogans during a demonstration in March 2006 at Manouba University near Tunis at a ceremony marking the donation of books from the library of the late Jewish Tunisian historian Paul Sebag. After the incident, the Manouba Student Union, mainstream citizen journalists, and the Tunisian Human Rights League strongly denounced the demonstration's anti-Jewish character.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

The public university system established a department of comparative religion designed to promote broader understanding of diverse religions.

Although legal, there was great societal pressure against Muslim conversion to other religions. Muslims who converted faced social ostracism. There was one report of expulsion of a convert from home and beating by family members.

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 ambassador and other eEmbassy officials met regularly with government officials and Muslim, Christian, and Jewish religious leaders throughout the reporting period. The Embassy fostered regular exchanges that included components designed to highlight U.S. traditions of religious tolerance and pluralism and disseminated the publication "Muslim Life in America."

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and the government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The federal Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of the country.

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

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

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's population is estimated at 4.5 million, approximately 85 percent of which are noncitizens. Approximately 85 percent of citizens were Sunni Muslim and the remaining 15 percent were Shi'a. Foreigners were predominantly from South and Southeast Asia, although there were substantial numbers from the Middle East, Europe, Central Asia, former Commonwealth of Independent States, and North America. Although no official figures were available, local observers estimated that 55 percent of the foreign population was Muslim, 25 percent was Hindu, 10 percent was Christian, 5 percent was Buddhist, and 5 percent belonged to other religious groups, including Parsi, Baha'i, and Sikh.

In late 2001 the Ministry of Planning inquired about religious affiliation in its first federal census. According to a ministry report compiled in 2003 using data collected during the census, 76 percent of the total population was Muslim, 9 percent was Christian, and 15 percent was "other."

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 since before the country's independence in 1971. In 1960 Christian missionaries opened a maternity hospital in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi; the hospital continued to operate. Missionaries also operated a maternity hospital in the Emirate of Fujeirah. An International Bible Society representative in al-Ain distributed Bibles and other religious material to Christian religious groups throughout the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion in accordance with established customs, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. The Government controls virtually all Sunni mosques, prohibits proselytizing, and restricts the freedom of assembly and association, thereby limiting the ability of religious groups without dedicated religious buildings to worship and conduct business. The Constitution declares that Islam is the official religion of all seven of the constituent emirates of the federal union. The Government recognizes a small number of Christian denominations through the issuance of land-use permits for the construction and operation of churches. Religious groups without dedicated buildings of worship often used the facilities of other religious groups or worship in private homes. There were no reports of government interference in this common practice.

The Government funds or subsidizes almost 95 percent of Sunni mosques and employs all Sunni imams; approximately 5 percent of Sunni mosques are considered private, and several large mosques have large private endowments. The Govern-

ment 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. Shi'a Muslims in Dubai may pursue Shi'a family law cases through a special Shi'a council rather than the Shari'a courts.

After a January 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 became the General Authority for Islamic Affairs and Endowments. At the end of the period covered by this report, the role of the Authority had been fully determined. There is neither an authority nor licensing or registration requirements for the recognition and regulation of non-Muslim religious groups.

Non-Muslim groups can own their own houses of worship, wherein they can practice their religion freely, by requesting a land grant and permission to build a compound from the local ruler (the title for the land remains with the ruler). There is no federal-level method of granting official status to religious groups or approving land grants. Rather, rulers of the individual emirates exercise autonomy in choosing whether to grant access to land and permission to build houses of worship within their emirates. Religious groups that do not have their own buildings must use the facilities of other religious organizations or worship in private homes. The police or other security forces do not interfere with gatherings held in private homes.

There were at least thirty-one Christian churches in the country built on land donated by the ruling families of the emirates in which they are located. There were two Hindu temples operating in rented commercial buildings in Dubai, one of which was used by Sikhs as well. Sikhs and Hindus living in Abu Dhabi also practiced their religion in private homes. Four emirates were home to parochial, Christian, primary, and secondary schools. The Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have donated land for Christian cemeteries, and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi has donated land for a Baha'i cemetery. There were two operating cremation facilities and associated cemeteries for the Hindu community, one in Abu Dhabi and one in Dubai.

Non-Muslim religious groups do not receive funds from the Government; however, those with land grants are not charged rental payments, and the local rulers grant the land for some religious buildings. In addition, the Emirate of Sharjah waives utility payments for religious buildings. Non-Muslim groups raised money from among their congregants and received financial support from abroad. Religious groups openly advertised certain 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 were far greater in number and size than those for other non-Muslim communities, despite the fact that Christians were estimated to represent less than a quarter of the non-Muslim population.

In practice, the Government supports a moderate interpretation of Islam; however, 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 three to five 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 follows a policy of tolerance toward non-Muslim religious groups and, in practice, interfered very little in their religious activities.

The Government's religious adviser, Ali Al-Hashemi, regularly represented the country at Islamic, ecumenical, and Christian conferences, and events in other countries. Al-Hashemi 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

The Federal Ministry of Justice distributes weekly guidance to both Sunni sheikhs 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, Buddhists, along with Hindus and Sikhs in places without temples, 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 the Sharjah municipality 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, for engaging in behavior offensive to Islam. While there are no specific laws against missionary activities, in the past the Government reportedly has threatened to revoke the residence permits of persons suspected of missionary activities. There were no reports of such threats during the period covered by this report.

In past years the media reported several cases where women claimed discrimination from employers in the private sector due to their decision to wear the hijab head covering at work, considered a religious mandate by many Muslim women. Some persons called for legal protection for female employees who wear the hijab. The Government did not publish an official position on the issue by the end of the reporting period.

According to the OpenNet Initiative's "Internet Filtering in the United Arab Emirates in 2004–2005: A Country Study," the country's sole Internet service provider, Etisalat, blocked websites containing religious information. These sites included information on the Baha'i faith, Judaism, negative critiques of Islam, and testimonies of former Muslims who converted to Christianity.

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 are 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.

There is a dual system of Shari'a (Islamic) courts for criminal and family law matters and secular courts for civil law matters. Non-Muslims are tried for criminal offenses in Shari'a courts. Not all crimes are punishable by Shari'a penalties. In cases punishable by Shari'a penalty, non-Muslims may receive civil penalties at the discretion of the judge, which generally occurs. Shari'a penalties imposed on non-Muslims also may be overturned or modified by a higher court.

Family law for Muslims is governed by Shari'a and the local Shari'a courts. Dubai has a special Shi'a council to act on matters pertaining to Shi'a family law. Muslim men may marry non-Muslim women "of the book," that is, Christian or Jewish women; however, Muslim women are not permitted to marry non-Muslim men unless the men convert to Islam. Because Islam does not consider the marriage between a non-Muslim man and a Muslim woman valid, both are subject to arrest, trial, and imprisonment on grounds of fornication. There were no reports of this occurring during the period covered by this report. Shari'a, according to the Maliki

school of jurisprudence, also is applied in cases of divorce. Women generally are granted custody of female children until they reach the age of maturity and are granted temporary custody of male children until they reach the age of twelve. 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. Religious instruction in non-Muslim religious groups is not permitted in public schools; however, religious groups may conduct religious instruction for their members on their religious compounds. According to Article 84 of the Federal Law No. 28 of 1999 concerning private education, private schools found teaching subjects that contravene Islam, defame any religion, or contravene the nation's ethics and beliefs may face penalties, including closure.

In March 2006, the Ministry of Education confiscated a social studies textbook entitled "World Cultures," which allegedly contained material offensive to Islam, glorified Israel, and promoted sentiments against tolerance. A ministry official described the book as "having a racist tone and is insulting to the country's religion and culture." The book has been used for the past ten years in one of the private schools in the country. The ministry banned the book from all private schools and severed ties with its publishing house.

Since many Baha'is 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On May 3, 2006, the Ministry of Education banned a Dubai-based expatriate school principal from teaching or working in the educational field in the country, after she was found guilty of insulting religion, culture, and traditions of the country. According to the press statement, the principal prohibited Qur'an recitals during school activities.

On May 2, President Sheikh Khalifa offered a monetary grant to the Greek Orthodox assistant patriarch, as a contribution to build an orphanage house, under the umbrella of Sidnaya monastery in Damascus.

On May 1, the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research organized a session on "Criminalizing the Offending of Religions." The session, under the auspices of the minister of justice, discussed, among other subjects, how Islamic Shari'a prohibits offending other religious groups.

On April 27, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, met with a delegation from the Oasis Hospital in al-Ain, and emphasized that Islam was a religion of peace and tolerance and had nothing to do with violence. The hospital, along with a church, was originally built in 1959 to serve the Christian community in the country at that time.

On April 23, the assistant under secretary for mosque affairs participated in the Easter mass and celebration for the Egyptian Orthodox Coptic church in Abu Dhabi.

On April 19, the Federal National Council General Secretariat received a statement from the Orthodox Parliamentary Association, through the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), condemning any direct or indirect disrespect to any religious figure.

On April 13–16, the country hosted an Islamic-Danish dialogue conference with the aim of building bridges of understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. The conference included thirty Danish academic and intellectual participants and Muslim scholars from the UAE and Gulf region.

On April 2 Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al-Nahyan, the minister of higher education, attended the consecration of the new Mar Thoma Indian Church at Mussafah in Abu Dhabi. In his speech, the minister stated that the Government continued to support tolerance and mutual respect between persons of different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

On March 16 the Greek Orthodox patriarch for Antakya and Levant visited the country to inaugurate an exhibition at the Juma al-Majed Center for Culture and Heritage. During the inauguration speech, the patriarch commended the religious harmony in the country and called it a model for peaceful coexistence between different religious groups.

On February 27 the religious advisor organized a session on the concept of dialogue in Islam, attended by the cultural advisor, Arab dignitaries, foreign ambassadors, representatives from the Egyptian Coptic and Ethiopian churches, and prominent scholars and academics. The session discussed the Government's policy of moderation and peace and the belief that Islam calls for justice and tolerance of other civilizations and religious groups.

On February 8, during a meeting with the OIC secretary general, Dubai Crown Prince Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum stressed the importance of civilized dialogue between Islamic leadership and non-Islamic leadership, and that human coexistence and communication was the common ground between all religious groups.

On February 7, during a meeting with the OIC secretary general, President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan emphasized the tolerance and moderation of Islam.

On February 4 the minister of higher education received the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem and discussed with him the importance of religious tolerance, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence between nations. That same day, the minister of justice and under secretaries from the Islamic Affairs section received the patriarch and expressed the necessity of dialogue between persons of different religious groups. The patriarch held a church Mass in Dubai on February 3.

In September 2005 the minister of justice met the head of foreign relations at the Evangelical Protestant Church in Germany and discussed religious tolerance. The meeting was attended by the under secretary and assistant under secretary for Islamic affairs.

In 1999 land was designated in the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah for the construction of a new Catholic church, which was completed in 2000. In December 2005 the church was allowed to open with the permission of the Ras al-Khaimah Crown Prince.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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, 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 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 country carrier, Emirates Airline, brought European tourists to Dubai on "Easter-special sightseeing packages."

Citizens occasionally expressed concern regarding the influence on society of the cultures of the country's foreign majority. However, in general, citizens are familiar with foreign societies and believed that the best way to balance foreign influence was by supporting and strengthening indigenous cultural traditions.

There were no anti-Semitic or religiously intolerant articles or statements in the English and Arabic-language electronic and print media. On a routine basis, all media carried articles or statements criticizing the policies and actions of the Israeli government.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom 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 have 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 under secretary of Islamic affairs on a regular basis to discuss religious freedom and tolerance.

On September 11, 2005, the Embassy invited the president's Judicial and Religious Affairs advisor to speak at a commemorative event at the Embassy where he stressed the nature of Islam as a religion of cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

In October 2005, the Embassy brought Imam Yahya Hindi, from Georgetown University, to speak about Islam in the United States, the importance of establishing an interfaith dialogue, and religious tolerance.

In May 2006, the ambassador received both the chair of the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations and the president's judicial and religious affairs advisor at the Embassy and discussed religious tolerance and the free practice of religion in the country. The ambassador invited the president's advisor to visit the United States and attend an iftar with the Secretary of State during Ramadan.

Embassy and consulate officials also help to protect religious freedom by monitoring its status through informal inquiries and meetings with government officials and representatives of Muslim, Christian, and other 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 during the reporting period, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Muslims and followers of religious groups other than Islam are free to worship according to their beliefs; however, the Government prohibits conversion from Islam and proselytization of Muslims.

Although relations among religious groups remained generally amicable and continued to contribute to religious freedom, there were some attacks on Jews. Government actions lessened political, tribal, and religious tension caused after it took action against armed insurrections by the "Shabab al-Moumineen," or "Believing Youth" movement, which the Government believes is linked to Twelver Shi'ism of Iran.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 328,080 square miles, and its population is approximately 20 million. Virtually all citizens were Muslims, belonging either to the Zaydi order of Shi'a Islam or to the Shafa'i order of Sunni Islam, representing approximately 30 percent and 70 percent of the total population, respectively. There were a few thousand Ismaili Muslims who reside mainly in the north.

Nearly all of the country's once-sizable Jewish population has emigrated. Less than 500 Jews were scattered in the northern part of the country, primarily in the vicinity of Raida and Saada.

There were approximately 3,000 Christians throughout the country, most of whom were refugees or temporary foreign residents. There were approximately 40 Hindus, who traced their origins to India, living in Aden. There were four churches in Aden, three Roman Catholic and one Anglican. Aden also had one Hindu temple. There were three known functioning synagogues in the north of the country.

Although there were some non-Muslim public places of worship known to exist in the area of the former North Yemen, they were discreetly located so as not to draw attention. No officially recognized non-Muslim public place of worship existed in areas of the former North Yemen. This was largely because it had no history of a large, resident foreign community such as existed in the south.

Christian missionaries and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) affiliated with missionary groups operated in the country, 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. The Government issues residence visas to priests so that they may provide for the community's religious needs. The Swedish Free Mission (SFM), financed by the Government of Sweden and churches in Sweden, ran a technical school for the disabled and poor in Taiz. There was also a Dutch Christian medical mission in Saada. An American

Baptist congregation affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention maintained an affiliation with a hospital in Jibla, which it ran for more than thirty years before transferring management to the Government in 2003. The Anglican Church ran two charitable clinics in Aden.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. During the reporting period, the Government began efforts to ease religious tension between it and some members of the Zaydi-Shi'a establishment. This tension began as a result of government action against the "Shabab al-Moumineen's" (The Believing Youth) armed insurrection that erupted in the summer of 2004 and again in April 2005. The Government maintains that the Shabab are adherents of Twelver Shi'ism, a variant of Shi'ism which differs from that of the country's predominant Zaydi-Shi'as. The Shabab follow the teachings of rebel cleric Hussein Badr Eddine al-Houthi, who was killed during a ten-week rebellion that he led in June 2004 against the Government in Saada. The Government's actions against the group in 2005 were politically, not religiously, motivated.

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 enforced this prohibition. The Government requires permission for the construction of new places of worship and prohibits non-Muslims from holding elected office. The Muslim holy days of Eid al-Adha, Muharram, and Eid al-Fitr are public holidays. Other religious groups in the country are not negatively affected by their celebration.

The Government does not keep track of an individual's religious identity, and there is no law that requires religious groups to register with the state. After the ruling party tried to put forward a Jewish parliamentary candidate, the General Election Committee 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, there were some restrictions.

Government actions to counter the increase in political violence restricted some practice of religion. In January 2006, for the second 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 reportedly also intensified its efforts to stop the proliferation of Houthism by limiting the hours that mosques were permitted to be open to the public, closing down what the Government believed to be extremist or Twelver-based Zaydi religious institutes, reassigning Imams who were thought to espouse radical doctrine, and increasing surveillance of mosque sermons.

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.

The Government did not allow the building of new public places of worship without previous authorization. At the end of the reporting period, Catholic officials were still waiting for a decision from the Government on whether it would allow an officially recognized Catholic establishment to be built in Sana'a. Church officials did not attribute government action to discrimination.

Weekly services for Catholic, Protestant, and Ethiopian Christians were held throughout Sana'a, Aden and other cities without government interference. Throughout the country, Christian church and Jewish synagogue 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 country maintains regular diplomatic relations with the Vatican. In December 2005 Archbishop Vladimir Goydiv of the Russian Orthodox Church visited in an effort to promote Islamic-Christian dialogue. During his visit, Goydiv met with Vice President Hadi Abd Rabo Mansour, as well as other Government officials and scholars. Public schools provide instruction in Islam but not in other religions; however, Muslim citizens can attend private schools that do not teach Islam.

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 are Islamic in nature, although it was not clear if they restricted their membership to Muslims.

During the previous reporting period, the Government significantly increased its efforts to prevent the politicization of mosques and schools in an attempt to curb extremism and increase tolerance. Efforts concentrated on monitoring mosques for sermons that incite violence or other political statements that it considers harmful to public security. Private Islamic organizations may maintain ties to international Islamic organizations; however, the Government sporadically monitored their activities through the police and intelligence authorities.

During the reporting period, the Government also continued efforts to close unlicensed schools and religious centers. By the end of the period covered by this report, more than 3,000 unlicensed religious schools had been closed. The Government expressed concern that these schools deviated from formal educational requirements and promoted militant ideology. The Government also deported foreign students found studying in unlicensed religious schools. Private and national schools are prohibited from teaching courses outside of the officially approved curriculum. The purpose of these actions was to curb ideological and religious extremism in schools.

There were reports that both the Ministry of Culture and the Political Security Office (PSO) monitored and sometimes pulled books that espoused Zaydi-Shiite Islamic doctrine from store shelves after publication. There were also credible reports that authorities banned the publishing of some materials that promoted Zaydi-Shiite Islam. The Government denied that the media was subject to censorship by any security apparatus.

Following the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, owners of property previously expropriated by the communist government of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen were invited to seek restitution of their property. However, implementation has been extremely limited, and very few properties have been returned to previous owners. In exchange for its confiscated property, the Catholic Church requested from the Government a small plot of land in Sanaa on which it would build a Catholic establishment. It 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-Muslim women (the women are Jewish or Christians) or apostates (those who have renounced Islam).

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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 (see Restrictions on Religious Freedom). 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.

During the reporting period, security officials arbitrarily arrested, detained, and tortured some individuals suspected of proselytizing. There were also credible reports that security officials harassed and detained Muslims affiliated with missionary elements in the Ibb and Jibla areas. Unconfirmed reports attributed such incidents to followers of conservative Salafi Islamic doctrine within the security apparatus.

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.

During the reporting period, most detained Shabab were reportedly released, but police and security forces continued to detain suspected members of radical Islamist groups. Since 2001 the Government has detained "for questioning" several hundred Islamists who returned to Yemen from Afghanistan and/or Iraq 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, sentenced to death, and Muhammed Ahmad Miftah, sentenced to eight 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 Houthism. Both men maintained that they only advocated peaceful dissent against government action in Saada.

During the same month, the Government released more than 200 Houthi rebel detainees. 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 affiliation with Houthi's religious teachings, the arrests appeared to have been politically, not religiously, motivated. All released detainees pledged not to participate in any future rebellion. The release followed a September 2005 general amnesty and promise of compensation for all detainees held as a result of the Saada conflict. In March 2006 state-run media announced the release of 630 Houthi supporters after 80 members of Parliament had visited the war-affected areas in Saada.

Throughout the reporting period, the Government continued to sponsor a dialogue with the Shabab and Islamist detainees. The dialogues were led by Islamic scholars in an attempt to arrive at an understanding by which detainees are released in exchange for repentance of past extremism; denunciation of terrorism; and commitments to obey the laws and government, respect non-Muslims, and refrain from attacking foreign interests. The program has had limited success.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

The country is predominantly Muslim. Apart from a small but undetermined number of Christians and Hindus of South Asian origin in Aden, Jews are the only indigenous religious minority. Religious minorities generally lived in harmony with their Muslim neighbors. On April 23, 2006, President Saleh met with a delegation of Yemeni Jews from the Amran governorate to discuss their concerns. According to official media, President Saleh also ordered "concerned bodies" to help ease their plight.

Isolated attacks in recent years by anti-Jewish extremists have convinced most of the country's Jews to relocate to the town of Raida for safety and to sustain their community. The Jewish population has diminished significantly over the last fifty years from tens of thousands to a few hundred due to voluntary emigration.

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. There has been a decrease in tensions between the Government and mostly Zaydi population after fighting subsided in the northern governorate of Saada. The Government also made attempts to reconcile with the citizens of Saada through reconstruction efforts and dialogue. 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 who were attempting to take control of moderate and Sufi mosques around the country. In September 2005 an unidentified German citizen living in the Hadramaut Governorate was accused of proselytizing and had his home and car set on fire. There were also unconfirmed reports that followers of Ismaili Islamic teachings were occasionally harassed and forbidden entry to mosques affiliated with Salafi followers.

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 Guidance conducted a six-day training course for 500 imams to promote principles of moderation and religious tolerance.

Christian clergy, who ministered to the foreign community, were employed in teaching, social services, and health care.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintained an active dialogue on human rights concerns with the Government, NGOs, and others. Embassy officers, including the ambassador, met periodically with representatives of the Jewish and Christian communities during the reporting period. During the year, the U.S. Government also sponsored a prominent judge involved with religious dialogue to participate in a program in the United States on promoting interfaith dialogue.

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." While the Government generally respected the right to religious freedom, years of Taliban rule and weak democratic institutions have contributed to intolerance manifested in widespread acts of harassment and sometimes violence against reform-minded Muslims and religious minorities.

Still recovering from twenty-five years of violence, the country has been moving into an age of greater stability and democracy. Since 2004, the country has held democratic presidential, parliamentary, and provincial council elections. In April 2006, President Karzai nominated a second cabinet, and by early August 2006, the new parliament had confirmed all of the twenty-five ministers nominated and all but one of the justices of the new supreme court. Efforts to reform the judiciary were underway with assistance from the U.S. and the international community. The Government took positive steps to increase religious freedom. Minister for Women's Affairs Massouda Jalal worked with the Ministry for Religious Affairs and the Hajj to provide women with greater access to mosques. The Government also responded positively to international approaches on religious freedom and worked effectively on high-profile cases such as the cases of Mohaqeq Nasab and Abdul Rahman.

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. The Danish cartoon controversy, in particular, resulted in several large demonstrations and more than a dozen deaths across the country. Condemnations of conversions from Islam and censorship increased concerns about citizens' ability to freely practice their religion.

The country's population was nearly entirely Muslim. Non-Muslim minority groups faced some incidents of discrimination and persecution. Conversion, which was generally held by many citizens to contravene Islam and Shari'a, garnered much public attention due to a high profile case that occurred during the reporting period. 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 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, and such discrimination continued to exist.

Prior to the fall of the Taliban, the U.S. Government had not maintained an official presence in the country for more than a decade. The Secretary of State designated the Taliban as a particularly severe violator of religious freedom with country of particular concern status in 1999, 2000, and 2001. The U.S. Government regularly discusses religious freedom issues with government officials as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officials continued to send political, civil society, and religious leaders to programs in the United States, and during the reporting period, the U.S. military helped rebuild fifty mosques damaged during the many years of war. Some Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) provided assistance to build madrassahs, or religious schools, for local communities. The embassy also advocated for the Hindu and Sikh community in their efforts to obtain land for cremation. Although land was assigned, the embassy continued to work to

finalize the agreement. Together with the international community, the U.S. Government expressed concern at the treatment of local converts to Christianity.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 251,738 square miles and a population of approximately 25.8 million. Reliable data on religious demography was not available because an official nationwide census has not been conducted in decades. Observers estimated that 80 percent of the population was Sunni Muslim; 19 percent was Shi'a Muslim; and other religious groups, including Sikhs, Hindus, and one Jew, made up less than 1 percent of the population. There also was a small, hidden Christian community; there were no reliable figures on its size, but estimates ranged from 500 to 8 thousand. In addition, there were 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 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.

Several regions were religiously homogeneous. Sunni Muslim Pashtuns, centered around the city of Kandahar, dominated the south and east of the country. The homeland of the Shi'a Hazaras was in the Hazarajat, the mountainous central highlands around Bamiyan. Northeastern provinces traditionally have had Ismaili populations. Other areas, including Kabul, the capital, were more heterogeneous. In and around the northern city of Mazar-e Sharif, for example, there was 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. 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 thousand persons, took refuge abroad during the many years of conflict; however, since the fall of the Taliban some minority members have begun to return. Non-Muslims, such as Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews, were estimated to number in the hundreds at the end of Taliban rule. During the reporting period, there were approximately 1,500 Sikhs and 100 Hindu families living in the country. There are five or six gurdwaras, Sikh places of worship, in Kabul, where worshippers generally were free to visit, and few threats were reported. The less distinguishable Hindu population faced little harassment. There were approximately six Hindu temples in four cities. An additional eighteen were destroyed during the many years of war. There was 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; however, an unofficial tradition of the state considers all citizens to be Muslim.

There were some missionary groups working in the country, but those that actively proselytized remained secret to avoid harassment or arrest by local officials.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The new constitution, ratified in January 2004, replaced the 1964 Constitution as law. 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 was an ongoing challenge due to the existence of a judicial system in need of significant reform.

The constitution proclaims that Islam is the "religion of the state"; however, it does not prohibit the practice of other religions. It states that "followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of law." The constitution also declares that "no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam." Interpretation of the constitution has proved difficult, since it contains both legal and religious elements.

The constitution makes no reference to Shari'a. Article 7 commits the state to abide by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other international treaties and conventions to which the country is a party.

Article 34 of the constitution protects freedom of expression and of the press. The press law, adopted in 2002, contains an injunction against information that "could mean insult to the sacred religion of Islam and other religions." The ambiguity surrounding what constitutes offensive material offers the potential for abuse of this clause to restrict press freedom and intimidate journalists. The press law does not require information to comply with Shari'a; however, the section on criminal rules states that if no punishment is prescribed in existing legal codes for crimes mentioned in the press law, then the punishment would be in accordance with Shari'a (Hanafi school). These rules also apply to non-Muslims. The law was reviewed by the Ministry of Information and Culture, and President Karzai signed the amended law on mass media in late March 2004. The law on mass media retains the broad and vague content restriction on "subjects that are contrary to principles of Islam and offensive to other religions and sects," but it excludes any reference to Shari'a. The law may be subject to change, since parliament had not reviewed it.

Proselytism was practiced discreetly; there are no laws forbidding the practice, even though it is viewed as contrary to the beliefs of Islam. The Government worked on revising the penal code to bring it in line with international standards during the reporting period.

Conversion from Islam is considered apostasy and is punishable by death under some interpretations of Shari'a. While the constitution makes no direct reference to Shari'a, and Article 7 of the constitution commits the state to abide by the international treaties and conventions requiring protection of religious freedom, no law contrary to the beliefs and provisions of Islam is permissible under the constitution. While not legally prohibited, conversion from Islam is strongly discouraged, and the legal consequences of conversion are subject to legal interpretation.

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 law. 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 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 June 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 set up local branches in the offices of chiefs of police. During the reporting period, all provinces had human rights departments to investigate abuses.

Only Islamic holy days are celebrated as public holidays. The Government has proclaimed the first day of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Tenth of Muharram (Ashura—both Sunni and Shi'a) as national holidays. All mark events on the Islamic calendar, and there were no reports that these holidays negatively affected other religious groups. The Shi'a community is able to celebrate openly the birthday of Imam Ali, one of the most revered figures in the Shi'a tradition.

The licensing and registration of religious groups is not required.

The components of the educational system that survived more than twenty-five years of war place considerable emphasis on religion. During the reporting period, the public school curriculum included Islamic content but no content from other religious groups. Non-Muslims were not required to study Islam. Detailed religious study was conducted under the guidance of religious leaders. There was no restriction on parental religious teaching. The 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 fifteen of the thirty-four 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.

While not legally prohibited, conversion is strongly discouraged since it is considered by many to be against the tenets of Islam. During the reporting period, there was one arrest of a convert to Christianity. In March 2006, Abdul Rahman, who converted to Christianity while living abroad during the Taliban regime, was detained for approximately one month and could have faced the death penalty for apostasy, but he was deemed not fit to stand trial before those charges could be brought against him. He was granted asylum in Italy due to potential threats on his life. There were no reports of abuse while in custody.

Immigrants and noncitizens 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; however, after the transitional government passed the political parties registration law in 2003, the supreme court temporarily banned communists from forming a political party on the ground that communists are atheists. The ban was later lifted.

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. While there was no known action taken against these individuals, some chose to leave the country after being discovered. There were an unknown number of foreign missionaries in the country who worked discreetly to avoid harassment.

There were fewer reports during the period covered by this report 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. For example, Kabul continued to have five radio stations, including the official Radio Kabul. Nongovernmental stations broadcast a mix of Afghan, Indian, Pakistani, and Western music. 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.

In January 2003, the supreme court banned cable television nationwide on religious grounds, but the ban was lifted in April 2003, when the Government passed a law allowing the resumption of cable services. In January 2004, Kabul Television broadcasted a female singer for the first time in more than a decade, prompting protests from conservatives on the supreme court, who briefly forced the station to stop airing such performances. Moderates in the Government lifted the ban later that month, saying women singers on television were permitted under the new constitution. In April 2004, officials in Nangarhar Province briefly banned the appearance of women singers on television; however, their superiors reversed the prohibition. In June and July 2004, Kabul and Jalalabad provincial governments banned cable television; the ban was later lifted.

In August 2005, Radio Bamiyan received isolated threats and complaints were filed against the station for allegedly providing un-Islamic and pro-American programming. In addition, a complaint petition was filed with the Ministry of Information and Culture.

In February 2006, a Kabul-based television station, Afghan Television, was fined $1,000 (50,300 afghani) for airing un-Islamic material. In addition, two local television stations were warned against programming that ran counter to local culture and did not conform to conservative views held by many in their respective localities.

In June 2006, several news agencies in Kabul claimed they were given a two-page document containing a list of restrictions on the broadcasting and publication of programs and subject matter which are against the morals and religious and accepted customs of the public that provoke people and cause security problems. The Government rejected reports that it had issued these instructions to local media restricting their activities.

Christian-affiliated international relief organizations generally operated throughout the country without interference. There were no reports of incidents of harassment during the period covered by this report. After an attack in late September 2003 that killed two employees of the Voluntary Association for Rehabilitation of Afghanistan, a Taliban spokesman accused the organization and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) of preaching Christianity. There were no further details on the attack during the reporting period.

Both Sunnis and Shi'as were permitted to go on the Hajj, and there was no quota system for those making the pilgrimage. Participants were selected by lottery.

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.

Most women in rural areas wear burqas, a traditional full body and face covering. Since the fall of the Taliban, a number of women in urban areas no longer wear the burqa; however, a majority of women continued to wear some form of head covering either by choice or community pressure. Urban women did not wear burqas before the Taliban imposed this practice.

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. There was one Hindu member in the upper house.

The Government failed to provide 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. A Sikh school in Kabul now reported having only one full-time teacher for 120 students. Four part-time teachers were assigned to the school for adult education but instead taught the children for two hours a week. There were no Christian or Jewish schools in the country.

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 would not be allowed to marry. According to government officials, the court 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; however, a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim man.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials occurred.

In January 2003, the governor of Helmand Province took control of approximately 200 Hazara-owned shops in Lashkar Gah and distributed them to other town residents. The governor also blocked the Hazara community from building a mosque in Lashkar Gah. While the AIHRC and the UN reached an agreement with the governor in February 2003 to compensate Hazara shopkeepers with land elsewhere in Lashkar Gah, the governor had only partially fulfilled his promise by the end of the period covered by this report.

In June 2003, two editors of a weekly Kabul publication were arrested for allegedly violating Article 30 of the press law that prohibits publication of articles defaming Islam. Conservatives within the judiciary recommended the journalists be charged with "insulting Islam" or blasphemy; however, senior government officials ultimately supported action short of criminal prosecution. Police searched the editors' offices, and the national intelligence agency confiscated the editors' publication, Aftaab, from stores. Moderates led by the minister of information and culture argued for the release of the journalists and a resolution to the press law—since amended—that permits administrative punishment (a fine) in lieu of prosecution. Within a week, President Karzai ordered the editors released on bail; however, the charges of blasphemy were not dropped. The two journalists obtained asylum outside the country during the second half of 2003.

In November 2003, twelve Tablighi preachers (itinerant Sunni missionaries) were detained for a day in Kandahar. There was no further police action against Tablighi preachers during the period covered by the report. The Tablighi claimed their mission was to spread the word of Islam. Some government intelligence officials accused the Tablighi of subversive work for Pakistan. Although an investigation of the group's activities concluded that the group was innocent of spying for the Taliban and al-Qa'ida, no action had been taken against the police officers involved in the case by the end of the reporting period.

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 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.

On October 22, 2005, Ali Mohaqiq Nasab, a journalist and editor of a women's rights magazine, was sentenced to two years in prison by a tribunal for blasphemy for reprinting and commenting on two articles. The articles questioned the harsh punishment imposed on women accused of adultery and theft under traditional Islamic law and advocated that conversion from Islam should not be considered a crime. After being tried in court, his sentence was reduced to six months on appeal (half of this time was suspended), and he was released on December 22, 2005.

There were other unconfirmed reports that converts faced societal discrimination and threats across the country. The press reported the killings of five male converts to Christianity near the eastern border between June and August 2004, but these reports could not be confirmed.

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.

In May 2005, news reports indicated that an Indian Hindu converted to Islam. The conversion ceremony was performed before supreme court representatives, the chief justice and chief of the supreme court, and local and international media. The conversion did not appear to have been forced.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were a few 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 reports of attacks on non-Muslim international organizations; however, there were no written records to validate the claims.

Attacks by remnants of the al-Qa'ida 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-Qa'ida and Taliban members who objected to their victims' links with the Karzai administration and to their public interpretations of Islam. These attacks were perceived by the public to be an attack on the Government and not on Islam.

On June 1, 2005, a mosque in the southern city of Kandahar was bombed during the funeral of an anti-Taliban cleric who had been shot dead three days earlier. Twenty persons, including the chief of the provincial capital's police force, were killed. Taliban insurgents were believed to be behind the attacks.

During the reporting period, numerous schools were attacked. While some claim schools allegedly connected with Christian groups were targeted by the Taliban, Muslim schools were also targets during the reporting period. Therefore, it was difficult to identify whether the motivation behind the attacks was religious or political. Unconfirmed press reports claimed that in September 2004, nine boys and a teacher died when a bomb detonated in the schoolyard of a madrassah in Zurmat. The madrassah offered morning Islamic lessons for local boys and with support from a foreign-funded agency, had added an afternoon curriculum of English, math, and other subjects taught in secular public schools. In addition, the teachers had been involved in helping men and women register to vote. Taliban terrorists claimed responsibility.

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 on high profile cases such as those of Mohaqeq Nasab and Abdul Rahman. 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.

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 increased in government, there apparently was less 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. These conflicts often have had economic and political roots but also have religious dimensions. The treatment of the Shi'a community varied by locality. The active persecution of the Shi'a minority, including Ismailis, that existed under the Taliban regime has ended. Although some discrimination continued at the local level, Shi'as 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.

In February 2006, six persons were killed during the Shi'a Ashura processions in Herat. Rumors circulated that Shiites were planning to perform their ritual self-flagellations at Herat's Blue Mosque, an important Sunni religious site. These rumors sparked a countermarch after Shi'a Governor Anwari made a public speech commemorating the holiday. Although the incident took place between religious groups, the event was possibly more politically than religiously motivated. It is believed that rural politicians took advantage of the holiday to foment violence to further their own agendas.

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 in the last year. For example, in early October 2003, a grenade was lobbed at the only functioning Sikh gurdwara in Kabul. There were no casualties. Prior to the incident, local police had warned the gurdwara authorities of a possible attack. Although police and intelligence officials investigated, no suspects had been apprehended by the end of the reporting period. In April 2005, a Sikh gurdwara in Khost was attacked and robbed by twenty-one armed men. The incident was still under investigation at the end of the reporting period. According to the Sikh community, in the fall of 2005, there was a report of the disappearance of a Sikh traveling from Kabul to Jalalabad. There was no additional information available at the end of the reporting period.

The AIHRC advocated for the rights of Sikhs and Hindus when this community complained in late 2003 that it was being denied access to its traditional cremation ground in Kabul by local residents. The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs was sympathetic and responsive to this complaint. In March 2004, Kabul municipal authorities allocated an alternative cremation site to the Sikh-Hindu community. The Sikh-Hindu community still alleged that they did not have access to the land and were working with the Kabul Municipality to resolve land titling problems. The site was reported to be in use by the end of the period covered by this report.

Some Sikh and Hindu children were unable to attend government schools due to harassment from teachers and students. The Government did not take sufficient steps to protect these children and reintegrate them into the classroom environment. 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. In January 2006, religious scholars in Kunduz province issued a resolution describing the celebration of non-Muslim religious festivals as against Shari'a; however, the governor of the province stressed the importance of respecting religious freedom. During the reporting period, President Karzai and other moderates in the Government opposed attempts by conservative elements to enforce rules regarding social and religious practices based on their interpretation of Islamic law.

In contrast to previous years, there were no new reported cases of forced chastity examinations. In 2004, the AIHRC intervened and aggressively launched programs designed to educate all levels of society in the provinces where forced chastity exams were administered. The AIHRC conducted surveys in late 2004 that indicated the practice had declined significantly. From 2004–2005, in Herat there were continued reports of forced chastity examinations by religious police of women found with males who were not their relatives; however, reports declined during the latter months of the reporting period. It was difficult to know whether this practice was systematic or sporadic, or done at the request of family members in the context of an extremely conservative environment. There were no reports of examinations directed at non-Muslims. Local officials also confronted women over their attire and

behavior, although there were no known official policies mandating the wearing of the burqa or regulating the activities of women.

Muslim clerics with political connections were also the target of violence. In May 2003, Habibullah, a Muslim cleric with close ties to President Karzai, was shot and killed outside a mosque in Deh Rawood district. Six persons were detained in connection with the killing. President Karzai issued a statement condemning it. By the end of the reporting period, there were no arrests and no further information on this case, including on the status of the persons originally detained. Also in May 2003, a well-known religious scholar, Mowlawi Haji Abdollah, was shot and killed after leaving a mosque after prayers in central Uruzgan Province. The Government stated that the Taliban and al-Qa'ida were responsible for the crime. The assailants had not been identified by the end of the period covered by this report.

In June 2003, a mosque in Kandahar was bombed during the final prayer of the day and sixteen worshippers were injured. The leader of the mosque and head of Kandahar's Ulema-u-Shura (clerics' council), Mullah Abdullah Fayaz, had stated that the Taliban were not correctly interpreting and following Islam. The Ministry of the Interior stated that two persons were arrested, one in July 2003 and the other in August 2003. In May 2005, the Ministry of Interior reported that one was still in custody pending investigations while the other had escaped. There were no new developments during the reporting period.

In April 2004, Maulana Abdul Bari, a former Minister of Hajj and Religious Affairs in Kandahar, was shot and killed outside his home by suspected Taliban members. At the end of the reporting period, there had been no arrests in the case, which continued to be under investigation. During the second half of 2004, two mullahs were killed in Ghazni and Muqar provinces.

In October 2005, in Helmand Province, a progovernment cleric was killed by a bomb during prayers, which also injured twelve worshippers. During the same month, also in Helmand, a progovernment mullah was killed in a drive-by shooting on his way home. The same day, two progovernment religious leaders were gunned down in Konar Province. The large number of religious figures killed in that month was attributed to antigovernment activity rather than to Sunni-Shi'a tension. It appeared that terrorists were trying to eliminate individuals with moderate religious views.

On September 7, 2004, NGOs reported and the AIHRC confirmed that a large mob attacked several offices and vehicles of NGOs, including the Agha Khan Development Network, in Faizabad in Badakhshan Province. The attack appeared to have been in response to rumors that the Agha Khan Development Network was using its aid projects to convert Sunni Muslims to Ismaili Shi'ism. Two women workers were raped at the NGOs' offices. The AIHRC also cited unconfirmed reports of rocket attacks on NGOs in Faizabad during that and other incidents.

In March 2005, a person in Helmand Province was beheaded, reportedly because of religious beliefs. No one was charged with the killing.

On May 9, 2005, Newsweek reported that U.S. interrogators desecrated the Qur'an at Guantanamo Bay. The report sparked demonstrations throughout the country, which resulted in the deaths of 17 persons and injury to another 120 persons. A local newspaper reported that an Islamic group reportedly linked to the ousted Taliban regime declared jihad, or holy war, against U.S.-led troops and the Government over the alleged Qur'an desecration.

Controversy over the Danish cartoons depicting Muhammad created a widespread public backlash. More than twelve persons were killed and many injured in protests that lasted a week and took place in several provinces. Response by government officials was mixed with members of the supreme court calling for censorship of Danish media, in contrast to President Karzai who accepted apologies and called for calm.

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. U.S. officials in Kabul and Washington urged the Government to quickly resolve the Abdul Rahman case. President Bush and Secretary of State Rice both made strong public statements calling for the release of Rahman.

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 fifty mullahs under a program on "Democracy and Civil Society." The approximate cost of this program was $250,000 (12,575,000 afghani).

The United States provided assistance for the cultural preservation of the Mullah Mohamood Mosque and the Shah Shaheed Shrine and granted money to sponsor, in cooperation with the Ministry of Hajj and Religion and a local NGO, a five-day conference in the fall of 2005 focusing on the role of the ulema (religious leaders) in the modernization and development of a democratic country. The conference helped to develop strategies for them to work with the Government. Over sixty religious leaders from across the country attended the conference as well as professors and scholars from Turkey, Egypt, and Pakistan.

In total, the U.S. military provided assistance to rehabilitate approximately fifty mosques during the period covered by this report.

During fiscal year 2003, the United States provided $600,000 (30,180,000 afghani) for technical assistance and capacity building for the AIHRC. The United States provided an additional $5 million (215 million afghani) to the commission during fiscal years 2004–2005 and committed $2 million (98,500,000 afghani) for fiscal year 2006.

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. The Civil Development Foundation, a group of reformist, largely Shi'a citizens, continued to publish the monthly magazine, Democracy, a project funded by a U.S. grant of $68,843 (3,390,517 afghani) to cover expenses from July 2004 to April 2005. One of the goals of Democracy was to challenge "religious despotism" and to promote a liberal and tolerant interpretation of Islam.

Other U.S. grants also helped to establish independent community and commercial radio stations throughout the country that broadcast programs on a range of topics including democracy and human rights concerns. During this reporting period, the United States assisted with the completion of independent community based radio networks and invested in training and business plan development for sustainable independent media organizations. The United States helped create thirty-five independent, community-based radio stations. U.S. assistance helped renovate and expand local radio stations throughout the country, especially in the south, where media freedom was severely restricted. The United States funded three new FM facilities in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border region, a critical area because of religious extremism.

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 and refused to give in to any of the protesters' demands. Religion exerted a powerful 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 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.

The generally amicable relationships among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, 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.

During the period covered by this report, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in a four party coalition that included the Islamic parties Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote, led the Government. Hindus were traditionally viewed as Awami League (AL) supporters. In the 300-seat parliament, religious minorities held eight seats. The AL has a Christian, a Buddhist, and two Hindu MPs, and the BNP has three Hindu MPs. There was also a Hindu MP elected as an independent candidate. Three non-Muslims held deputy or state minister or equivalent positions in the Government. The acute animosity between the two mainstream political parties often led to politically motivated violence, and sometimes to heightened tensions between Muslims and Hindus.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. In meetings with officials and in public statements, officers at the U.S. Embassy encouraged the Government to protect the rights of minorities. Government officials were particularly encouraged to take necessary measures to ensure minority rights for the election scheduled to be held in 2007. Publicly and privately, the embassy denounced acts of religious intolerance and called on the Government to ensure due process for all citizens. When two Christians working for a nongovernmental organization (NGO) were killed, the embassy issued a press release condemning the violence. The U.S. Government sponsored the visit of a prominent U.S. Muslim cleric who spoke to audiences about Qur'anic interpretations that support tolerance and gender equity. In February 2006, U.S. Representative Joseph Crowley of New York visited places of worship belonging to several faiths and met with representatives of religious minorities to demonstrate support for religious diversity and tolerance.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,126 square miles, and its population was 146 million. Sunni Muslims constituted 88 percent of the population. Approximately 10 percent of the population was Hindu. The remainder was mainly Christian (mostly Roman Catholic) and Theravada-Hinayana Buddhist. Ethnic and religious minority communities often overlapped and were concentrated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and northern regions. Buddhists were 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 were small populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, animists, and Ahmadis. Estimates of their numbers varied from a few thousand to 100 thousand adherents for each faith. There was no indigenous Jewish community, nor a significant immigrant Jewish population in the country. There were no synagogues or other Jewish institutions.

Religion was 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 "foreign residents" were returned Bangladeshi emigres. There were approximately 30 thousand Rohingyan refugees, who practiced Islam. There was no reliable estimate of the number of missionaries, but several Christian denominations operated schools, orphanages, or other social programs throughout the country. A substantial number of Christian missionaries, primarily based in Dhaka and Chittagong, engaged in social development projects. Every year, the Tabliqui Muslim community holds the Biswa Itjema, the world's second largest gathering of Muslims. The Tabliqui came from all over the world, including the United States, but mostly from South and South East Asia. They worked with populations that were already Muslim and encouraged them to be more devout. Several faith-based NGOs, including World Vision and Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) International, 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 ones' choice is guaranteed by the constitution, local authorities and communities often objected to efforts to convert persons from Islam. Strong social resistance to conversion from Islam means that most missionary efforts by Christian groups were aimed at serving communities that have been Christian for several generations or longer. In 2006, a group of recent Christian converts from Buddhism built a church in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Buddhist members of the community, angry at the conversion and at the use of a disputed piece of land, set fire to the church. Investigation into the case continued.

In general, government institutions and the courts protect religious freedom. Traditionally there was little interference or regulation by the Government concerning Islamic practices. The Government ran imam training academies and proclaimed days of festivals but did not dictate sermon content, select or pay clergy, or closely monitored 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 decision prohibited all fatwas, which also included pronouncements on purely religious matters such as when festivals can begin or whether a marriage or divorce is valid from a religious standpoint. Several weeks later, the appellate court stayed the high court's ruling, stating that while the appeal was pending, the ban on fatwas could not be implemented. Given the heavy appellate court caseload, it was unclear when the appeal was expected to be considered.

Islamic tradition dictated that only those muftis (religious scholars) who have expertise in Islamic law were 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 a second 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 faiths.

Religion exerted a powerful influence on politics, and the Government was sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of its political allies, Jamaat Islami and the Islami Okiyya Jote, as well as the majority of its citizens.

The 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 recently 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 $1.7 million (120 million taka). The trust was founded in the 1980s. This trust used its money to repair temples, modify cremation pyres, and help destitute Hindu families afford medical treatment; approximately $29 thousand (2 million taka) went towards annual Puja celebrations. The Buddhist Welfare Trust, also founded in the 1980s, had a fund of $425 thousand (30 million taka) at the end of the period covered by this report. Funds were used to repair monasteries, organize training programs for Buddhist monks, and celebrate the Buddhist festival Purnima. There have been no public criticisms of how the money is proportioned or distributed.

Major religious festivals and holy days of the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian faiths 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. In 2003 and 2004, the Government took action in a nontransparent manner against six NGOs perceived as anti-government or pro-opposition, temporarily closing one of them. This NGO subsequently reopened, and reported no additional government harassment. A prominent NGO had its outside grants blocked in 2001 after its director expressed concern over attacks on minorities. The leader of this NGO declared that although the Government agreed in principle to release the grants, by the end of the period covered by this report it had not released any funds. 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 thousand Muslim religious schools, or madrassahs. Some madrassahs were government-funded and some were privately funded and run, according to a recent U.S. Government study. There were no known government-run Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist schools.

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 supported the creation of the Council for Interfaith Harmony-Bangladesh, 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Since 2004, anti-Ahmadiyya extremists have publicly demanded that the Government declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims. The International Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh (IKNMB) and a splinter group, the Khatme Nabuwat Andolon Bangladesh (KNAB), first announced a January 2004 deadline, and in December 2005, again issued an ultimatum and threatened violent protests at Ahmadiyya mosques. The Government rejected the ultimatum and successfully kept protesters a safe distance from all Ahmadiyya buildings. On December 24, 2005, the Daily Star reported that 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." In June 2006, the KNAB announced a weeklong program including dawn to dusk hartals (strikes) near Dhaka and a shutdown of the airport to force the Government to declare Muhammad as the last prophet in the ongoing parliament session as a primary step in declaring Ahmadis non-Muslims. Using minimal force, police prevented the protests from approaching the Ahmadiya facilities, and the KNAB's hartal program failed to materialize. The Ahmadiya community complimented the Government for its responsiveness to their concerns and its professional handling of the protests.

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 faiths were unable to renew their one-year religious worker visas. Some foreign missionaries reported that internal security forces and others closely monitored their activities.

On January 8, 2004, the Government announced a ban on all Ahmadiyya publications. The ban was not formalized, but in 2004, police detained a boy for three days

for possession of Ahmadiyya books, and during demonstrations in April and May 2004, police entered two Ahmadiyya mosques and seized documents. In December 2004 the Government prepared a statement banning Ahmadiyya publications but did not release it. After local human rights activists and Ahmadiyya leaders challenged this statement, the high court stayed the ban, making it unenforceable until the court ruled on it. The Government opposed court challenges to the ban on the grounds the ban had not been promulgated officially and was, therefore, beyond judicial scrutiny. 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.

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. They attributed this circumstance to the education that the British offered during the nineteenth century, which Muslims boycotted but Hindus embraced.

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 "enemy" (in practice Hindu) lands to be expropriated by the Government. Approximately 2.5 million acres of land were seized from Hindus, and almost all of the 10 million Hindus in the country were affected. 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 ninety 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.

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 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 three 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 on the books 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

Reports of BNP harassment, violence and rape of Hindus, who many believed supported the AL, preceded and followed the 2001 election. The high court ordered the Government to report on these attacks and to demonstrate that it was taking adequate steps to protect religious minorities. The Government submitted its report to the high court in 2002, claiming that incidents of post-election violence were not connected to communal relations and that some reports of violence were fabricated or exaggerated. Since then, neither the high court nor the Government has taken further action. There was no religiously related political violence during any by-election during the period covered by this report.

Since the 2001 elections, attacks on religious minorities have led to the routine posting of law enforcement personnel during major religious festivals and events,

since festivals tend to attract large congregations that 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 Government sometimes failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who were often local gang leaders.

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 banned but were openly sold on street corners.

As of the writing of this report, no charges have been filed in the 2003 case of eleven members of a Hindu family burned to death after assailants set fire to their home near the port city of Chittagong. BDG officials ascribed the crime to robbers following a failed robbery attempt, but the opposition AL alleged that BNP members attacked the family as part of a local anti-Hindu cleansing effort. Within a month of the attack, police arrested five persons, three of whom confessed to the magistrate and claimed that fourteen persons were involved in what they stated was an attempted robbery. Police have twice submitted their investigations to court but the public prosecutor has declared the investigations "faulty," so a third round of investigation was in process.

At the end of the reporting period, it was unknown what happened to the evicted families in the June 22, 2005 eviction of sixty-five families from their land by government officials to establish a government project in the same place. According to press reports, the evicted families consisted of fifteen families from the indigenous Santali Christian community and fifty Hindu families.

The Daily Sangbad reported that on October 20, 2005, a Hindu teacher, Srabani Sur, was dismissed after being accused of allegedly insulting Islam. She submitted an appeal to the education board claiming the allegations were false.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religious groups by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report. However, the banned extremist group Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) attacked a variety of government and civil society targets in late 2005 on the grounds they supported secular governance. Earlier in 2005, JMB attacked a Bangladeshi NGO for promoting un-Islamic practices, such as teaching women to run businesses and extending microcredit, in rural areas; however, these attacks were almost all on other Muslims. The fact that one of two judges JMB killed in Jalakhathi was Hindu was scarcely noted and was never cited by JMB as a reason for his killing.

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 nonmosques or threatening the lives or property of Ahmadis. This contrasted sharply from previous years, when police sometimes facilitated the hanging of such signs.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Relations between religious communities generally were amicable. Persons who practiced different religions often joined each other's festivals and celebrations such as weddings. Shi'a Muslims practiced their faith without interference from Sunnis. Nevertheless, 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.

In September 2003, Ibrahim Khali and Dulal were sentenced to life in prison for raping a Hindu woman. Both convicts were serving their terms while their appeals were pending. In October 2003, a Speedy Trial Court sentenced six persons to life in prison and acquitted a seventh person accused of raping a Hindu woman after the 2001 parliament election in the Sadar sub-district of Bhola. The convicts appealed the verdict to the high court; the appeal was pending at the end of the period covered by this report while those convicted were serving their sentences.

Attacks against the Hindu community at the hand of societal actors continued. An NGO reported that during the period from December 1, 2004 to November 2005, there were 52 killings, 78 attacks on Hindu temples, 29 kidnappings, and 161 incidents of assault, theft, looting, or intimidation.

There were no new developments in the February 2004 case of Humayun Azad, a Muslim Dhaka University professor who sustained serious injuries when unidentified assailants stabbed him near campus. The Government never identified the assailants. Azad died of a heart attack in Germany in 2004.

There were unconfirmed reports that in September 2005, twelve indigenous Hindu cobblers from the Chandpur Village were evicted. Reportedly, a Kwami madrassah was built on the land.

According to one NGO, on October 15, 2005, the "Ma Kali Mandir" Temple in Patuakhali was forcefully occupied, and its Hindu priest was physically assaulted. Reportedly, the temple then was turned into a madrassah.

On October 15, 2005, approximately 200 Hindu families were attacked and 10 houses burned down in Majhipara Village. Reportedly, ten persons were injured and the local temple was vandalized. Police were sent to the site and arrested five persons.

On October 25, 2005, Gopal Chandra Braman, a Hindu priest in the Narsingdi District was killed after being kidnapped on October 18.

According to a press report, in December 2005, two Hindus were killed and ten others were injured when a Hindu majority village in Dhubaura sub-district was attacked by a land grabber. Police intervened and arrested the perpetrator.

On December 31, 2005, a Hindu village in Brahmanbaria was attacked after an announcement was made at the village mosque. Reportedly, five homes were damaged and two men were injured as a result of the attack.

Two newspapers reported on March 16, 2006, that a group of approximately eighteen persons attacked six Hindu families and injured ten individuals in the District of Satkhira while demanding a large sum of money due to a land dispute. When the owner of the land refused to pay, the attackers physically assaulted him.

Reports of harassment and violence against the Christian community were recorded during the reporting period.

Unconfirmed reports indicated that in July 2005, Grace Presbyterian Bible College in Khulna was moved to a different location after the school was attacked three times.

In July 2005, according to press reports, four Christian-owned stores were burned down in the Barisal area. Police arrested five persons in connection with the arson case. It was not clear if the crimes were religiously motivated.

On July 27, 2005, two Bangladeshi Christian NGO workers were killed in Boalmari, Faridpur. They worked primarily in the areas of arsenic poisoning, mother and child healthcare, and AIDS prevention, but they also showed religious films with the permission of the villagers. A week before the attack, the NGO workers were reportedly threatened by local leaders angry at their attempts to convert local persons to Christianity. Two men were arrested for the killings.

On April 2, 2006, local newspapers reported that arsonists burned down a church in the remote village of Lambopara in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, apparently in retaliation for conversion of local Buddhists to Christianity. There were no arrests in this case.

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 2005 religious leaders issued thirty-five fatwas, demanding punishments ranging from lashings and other physical assaults to shunning by family and community members.

There were approximately 100 thousand 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.

In the latter part of 2003, Ahmadis were the targets of attacks and harassment prompted by clerics and leaders of the Islami Okiyya Jote. In October 2003, seventeen Ahmadiyya families in Kushtia were barricaded in their homes for several days. In November 2003, police stopped a mob of approximately 5 thousand attempting to destroy an Ahmadiyya mosque in Tejgaon, Dhaka. In December 2003, anti-Ahmadi activists killed a prominent Ahmadi in Jessore. There were no results from the subsequent police investigations in any of these cases.

Throughout 2004, the police provided minimal protection to Ahmadiyya communities facing harassment. In April 2004, twelve Ahmadiyya houses were destroyed and fifteen Ahmadis in Rangpur reportedly were held against their will and pressed to renounce their faith. In May 2004, Khatme Nabuwat Andolon Bangladesh reportedly threatened to evict thousands of Ahmadis from their homes and destroy their mosques in Patuakhali, Rangpur, and Chittagong. In October 2004, an anti-Ahmadi mob injured eleven Ahmadis in an attempt to seize a mosque. No legal action was taken against these alleged assailants. The situation continued through the beginning of 2005.

In March 2005, a mob attempted to lay siege to a mosque in the town of Bogra, hoping to remove the "Ahmadi Mosque" sign. Police controlled the mob but removed the sign. After a few hours, police put the sign back up. In April 2005, there was a spate of IKNMB attacks on Ahmadis, including one in the Shatkira District where protesters injured more than fifty persons after hanging a new sign on an Ahmadi mosque.

On July 18, 2005, extremists allegedly vandalized the construction site of an Ahmadiyya mosque in the Uttara section of Dhaka. The police promptly intervened.

In December 2005, IKNMB and KNAB again issued an ultimatum that the Government declare Ahmadis non-Muslims. When the Government refused, the groups staged a protest near the Dhaka Ahmadiyya complex, but police successfully kept the protesters away from the Ahmadis and their property. Approximately fifty protesters and seven police officers were injured.

In January 2006, villagers in Shahbazpur protested when Ahmadis in their community attempted to bury an Ahmadi woman who died of old age in the Muslim cemetery. Police and local leaders intervened but ultimately gave into the villagers' demands. Local government leaders gave a small plot of publicly owned land to the Ahmadis to use for the burial.

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 thousand 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 ten to twenty persons were injured as a result. Following the KNAB's failure to seize the mosque, the group announced a dawn-to-dusk hartal and added the demand that parliament pass a law declaring Muhammad as the last prophet; however, the hartal threat never materialized.

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. Embassy staff traveled to regions of the country where violence was worst in 2001 and met with civil society members, NGO leaders, members of parliament, 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 minorities.

Embassy and visiting U.S. Government officials regularly visited members of minority communities to hear their concerns and demonstrate support. During his February 2006 visit, U.S. Representative Joseph Crowley of New York visited Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Ahmadiyya houses of worship, to discuss religious freedom concerns and support the minority communities. He also discussed the importance of an election free from communal violence.

Following the death of two Christian NGO workers in Boalmari, Faridpur, the embassy issued a press release stating that religious freedom was a basic constitutionally guaranteed right, and it was important that the Government and civil society work effectively to safeguard this right.

The embassy assisted U.S. Christian-affiliated relief organizations in guiding paperwork for approval of schools and other projects through government channels. The Government has been receptive to 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. The U.S. Government sponsored the visit of a prominent Muslim cleric from Georgetown University to talk to Bangladeshi audiences. He spoke to both small roundtables and to thousands at Friday prayers at the national mosque about Qur'anic interpretations that support tolerance and 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 and mostly freely practice Hinduism. The draft constitution, introduced in March 2005, guarantees freedom of religion but had not been adopted by the end of the period covered by this report.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Pressure for conformity with Mahayana Buddhist norms was reinforced through the requirement that citizens wear the traditional dress of the ethnic Ngalops, who are predominantly Buddhist, in all government buildings, monasteries, and schools. There were no reports of violence associated with pressure to conform to Mahayana norms.

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

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 informally as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 18,146 square miles, and according to the May 2005 nationwide census, the population was 552,996. Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of the population practiced Drukpa Kagyupa or Ningmapa Buddhism, both of which are disciplines of Mahayana Buddhism. Approximately one-quarter of the population was ethnic Nepalese who practiced Hinduism. Christians, both Catholic and Protestant combined, comprised a fraction of 1 percent of the population.

The Drukpa discipline was practiced predominantly in the western and central parts of the country, although there were adherents in other regions.

Ethnic Ngalops, descendants of Tibetan immigrants, comprised the majority of the population in the western and central parts of the country. The Ngalops predominated in government and the civil service, and the monarchy decreed their cultural norms and dress to be the standard for all citizens.

The Ningmapa school of Mahayana Buddhism was practiced predominantly in the eastern region of the country, although there were also adherents in other areas.

Most living in the east were ethnic Sarchops, descendants of those thought to be the country's original inhabitants. Several Sarchops held high positions in the Government, the national assembly, and the court system.

The Government supports both Kagyupa and Ningmapa monasteries. The royal family practices a combination of Ningmapa and Kagyupa Buddhism, and many citizens believe in the concept of "Kanyin-Zungdrel," meaning "Kagyupa and Ningmapa as one."

The country's animist and shamanistic faith called Bon revolves around the worship of nature and predates Buddhism. Although Bon priests were found and Bon rituals sometimes were included in Buddhist festivals, very few citizens adhered to this faith exclusively.

The Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Shakta, Ghanapathi, Puranic, and Vedic schools were represented among Hindus mainly in the south. Hindu temples existed in the southern part of the country, and Hindus were allowed to practice their religion in small- to medium-sized groups.

Christians were present throughout the country in very small numbers. There was reportedly only one building dedicated for Christian worship in the south, the only location where there was a sufficiently large concentration of Christians to sustain a church. Elsewhere, Christian families and individuals were free to practice their religion at home, although nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claimed that the Government discouraged open worship and both large and small gatherings. There were no Christian missionaries operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government limited this right in practice. NGOs reported that the Government discouraged both large and small religious gatherings of non-Buddhists, did not allow construction of churches or non-Buddhist temples, and did not allow non-Buddhist missionaries to work in the country. Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion. Proselytism by other faiths is illegal under the Bhutanese National Security Act.

The country's Monastic Body of 3,500 monks was financed by an annual government grant and was the sole arbiter on religious matters. The body also played an advisory role to the national assembly, the Royal Advisory Council, and the king, who consistently deferred to its pronouncements on almost all religious matters and some decisions affecting the state. By statute, 10 seats in the 150-seat national assembly and 2 seats on the 11-member Royal Advisory Council are reserved for Buddhist monks. There are no religious stipulations on the remaining seats. Many non-Buddhists work for the government. The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, with a Hindu priest as a member, also advised on religious matters.

Questions on family law subjects such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and child custody were addressed under the Marriage Act of 1980, as amended in 1996. Traditionally, Buddhists and Hindus have resolved questions of family law according to the citizen's religion, but this is changing. In 2005, a Christian group in the country reported in 2005 that family law concerns for all citizens, regardless of religion, were resolved according to Buddhist precepts. The country's evolving legal system is based on customary law and Buddhist precepts.

The Government subsidized Buddhist monasteries and shrines and provided aid to approximately one-third of the kingdom's 12 thousand monks. The Government stated that it provides this support because its land reform program carried out in 1956 stripped the monastic establishment of wide tracts of fertile land for redistribution among the landless. In exchange, the Royal Government committed to provide financial support for the monasteries.

Major Buddhist holy days were state holidays. The king declared one major Hindu festival as a national holiday, and the royal family participated in it; however, there were no Hindu temples in the capital city of Thimphu, despite the migration of many ethnic Nepalese to the city.

NGO representatives living outside the country and dissidents reported that only Drukpa Kagyupa and Ningmapa Buddhist religious teaching is permitted in schools and that Buddhist prayer is compulsory in all government-run schools. The Government contended that Buddhist teaching is permitted only in monastic schools and that religious teaching is forbidden in other schools. Bhutan-based 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, when in public places, to wear the traditional dress of the Ngalop majority; 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.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Followers of religions 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. In 2004 an NGO reported that some Christians did not worship openly for fear of discrimination; however, this claim could not be corroborated. The Christian community also claimed that there were no Christian churches in the country and that the Government would not grant approval for such a building.

No new buildings, including new places of worship, can be constructed without government licenses. Reports by ethnic Nepalese citizens suggested that this process favored Buddhist temples over Hindu ones. The Government provided financial assistance for the construction of Buddhist temples and shrines and state funding for monks and monasteries. NGOs alleged that the Government rarely granted permission to build Hindu temples; the last report of such construction was in the early 1990s, when the Government 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.

While the formation of political parties was not allowed under the law, the draft constitution would permit the creation of political parties, with no membership restrictions based on religion.

While proselytism and conversion were not discussed in the constitution, such activities were deemed illegal by the Government due to the National Security Act, which prohibits "words either spoken or written, or by other means whatsoever, promotes or attempts 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 Act is punishable with up to three years' imprisonment although it is not clear that the Government has enforced this provision of the act.

International Christian relief organizations and Roman Catholic Jesuit priests were active in education and humanitarian activities.

There were no laws against publishing religious material.

Some NGOs reported increased intimidation by the Government of persons who do not look ethnically Ngalop, most of whom are Buddhists. Such actions reportedly included stopping persons at designated checkpoints and asking for their identity documents. The Government claimed the identity checks were part of an effort to control illegal residents and to ensure that the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) does not re-enter the country. In 2003, the Government ousted ULFA camps from southern areas of the country.

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.

Christians stated that in prior years the Government excluded them from census registration, making it difficult for them to qualify for higher education or government jobs. There were no reports of the Government excluding Christians from the May 2005 census.

One Christian group alleged in April 2005 that personal prejudices may have led selected government officials to deny promotions to some of the handful of Christians in government service.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities discriminated against ethnic Nepalese residents and citizens in the late 1980s and early 1990s when many were forcibly expelled, or left voluntarily as a result of discrimination. Although the causes of this official discrimination and the expulsions were cultural, economic, and political, to the degree that their Hinduism identified them as members of the ethnic Nepalese minority, religion might have been a secondary factor. The Government contended that many of those expelled in the early 1990s were illegal immigrants with no right to citizenship or residency and that other ethnic Nepalese "voluntarily emigrated" at that time. Some of those expelled are petitioning for the right to return, although none have yet done so.

More than 100 thousand ethnic Nepalese continued to live in refugee camps in eastern Nepal. (For a more detailed discussion, see the 2005 Country Report on Human Rights Practices.)

The Government resettled Bhutanese citizens from other parts of the country on land in the south vacated by the expelled ethnic Nepalese, a majority of whom were Hindu, in the early 1990s. Human rights groups maintained that this action prejudiced any possibility for land restoration to returning refugees. The Government maintained that this was not its first resettlement program and that ethnic Nepalese citizens from the south sometimes were resettled in other parts of the country.

In April 2004 a religious freedom website alleged that following Easter Sunday services, police raided three Protestant house churches in the Sarpang district. Police allegedly warned church members to stop meeting and told them that the Government viewed their meetings as "terrorist activities." The Government dismissed these reports as totally false.

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

NGOs and well-informed local sources stated that the Government in early 2005 began to issue national identity cards to ethnic Nepalese who have family members living in refugee camps in Nepal. In the past, the Government refused to renew identity cards for some ethnic Nepalese. This was a marked change in government policy and could point to a greater acceptance of these predominantly Hindu persons as bona fide citizens of the country.

In 2005, attempts were made to promote interfaith understanding. Monks from the country's two schools of Buddhism, Kagyupa and Ningmapa, undertook regular exchanges. The king's participation in a Hindu festival also had a positive effect on citizens' attitudes.

In March 2005, the Government released a draft constitution stipulating freedom of religion as a fundamental right. It stated, "A Bhutanese Citizen shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." The draft constitution also guarantees freedom of speech, opinion and expression to all religious communities in the country, including non-Buddhists. It also states "Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of the country, which promotes among others the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion and tolerance" and that "religion remains separate from politics."

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Governmental discrimination against ethnic Nepalese in the late 1980s and early 1990s arose in part from a desire to preserve the country's Buddhist culture against the influence of a growing population of ethnic Nepalese with different cultural and religious traditions. It also was a response to increased political assertiveness of the ethnic Nepalese community.

During the reporting period, the Government and many Buddhists remained preoccupied with fears of potential Nepalese domination. Societal pressures toward non-Buddhists were reflected in official and unofficial efforts to impose the dress and cultural norms of the Buddhist majority on all citizens. While there were no reports of the repetition of the excesses of the late 1980s and early 1990s, societal and governmental pressure for conformity with Drukpa Kagyupa norms was prevalent.

In 2005, some of the country's few Christians, who are mostly ethnic Nepalese living in the south, claimed that they were harassed and discriminated against by the Government, local authorities, and non-Christian citizens.

On January 7, 2006, authorities arrested two civil servants for proselytism in the village of Nago in Paro District. The Government stated the two were posing as if they were on official duty and instructed the residents of Nago village to assemble for official discussions on faith. The Government reported that during their discussion one of the civil servants made derogatory remarks against the Spiritual Head of Bhutan, and the villagers demanded they stop the session and reported the incident to the police. Two days later, the Government found the two guilty of falsely calling a village meeting on the pretext of holding an official meeting, proselytism, maligning the Spiritual Head of Bhutan, and posing as officials on official business and giving false information. The police also charged one of the accused, who was a nurse by profession, with breach of trust and criminal misappropriation of govern-

ment property for unauthorized distribution of medicines, claiming he did so in order to gain the confidence of the villagers. Christian groups claim they were arrested due to their religion since, according to these groups, the men were allegedly arrested while showing a Christian film in a Buddhist home. Reportedly, the men were given ten days to appeal to the courts for bail to avoid serving prison sentences of three to three and a half years and were tried without adequate legal representation.

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, governmental discrimination against the ethnic Nepalese minority was discussed.

In August 2005, U.S. embassy officers from New Delhi discussed religious freedom with the Government in the context of the refugee issue and the draft constitution in Thimphu. During the meeting, officials discussed the draft constitution, including the inclusion of guarantees of religious freedom and protection for minority populations. The officials also reiterated that the Government needs to find a lasting solution for the refugees in Nepal, who are mostly Hindu, in order to demonstrate its commitment to religious tolerance.

The U.S. Government also worked to promote religious freedom and other democratic values by sponsoring several citizens to travel to the United States under the International Visitors and Fulbright programs.

INDIA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. However, the Government sometimes did not act swiftly enough to counter effectively societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by some leaders of state and local governments to limit religious freedom. This resulted in part from legal constraints on national government action inherent in the country's federal structure and from shortcomings in its law enforcement and justice systems, although courts regularly upheld the constitutional provision of religious freedom. 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.

While the National Government took positive steps in key areas to improve religious freedom, the status of religious freedom generally remained the same during the period covered by this report. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) continued to implement an inclusive and secular platform based on respect for the country's traditions of secular government and religious tolerance, and the rights of religious minorities. Terrorists attempted to provoke religious conflict by attacking Hindu Temples in Ayodhya and Varanasi. The Government reacted in a swift manner to rein in Hindu extremists, prevent revenge attacks and reprisal, and assure the Muslim community of its safety. The Government also quelled religious violence in Vadodara, Gujarat, after protests over the demolition of a Muslim shrine threatened to spark Hindu-Muslim violence. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) continued monitoring ongoing legal battles surrounding the 2002 Gujarat riots.

Despite the Government's 2005 action to withdraw controversial textbooks espousing a Hindu nationalist agenda, continuing problems with biased textbooks in some states led the Government to take further action by recommending the formation of a National Textbook Council to ensure such books no longer appear in the curriculum.

Despite the UPA Government's rejection of "Hindutva," the ideology that espouses politicized inculcation of Hindu religious and cultural norms above other religious norms, the ideology continued to influence governmental policies and societal attitudes in some regions at the state and local levels. However, "Hindutva"-based policies could not be implemented without passing court review to determine whether they were consistent with the principles enshrined in the country's secular constitution.

In March 2006, the Government of Rajasthan passed an anti-conversion bill. However, by the end of the period covered by this report, it had not taken effect, since it was not approved by the governor and continued to await presidential review.

In August 2005, the Nanavati commission, tasked with conducting a re-inquiry into the anti Sikh riots of 1984, released its report. The report cited several prominent Congress party leaders for complicity in the violence and implicated law enforcement personnel in the deaths, accusing them of refusing to perform their duty to maintain law and order. Minister Jagdish Tytler and Member of Parliament Sajjan Kumar were indicted in the report for purportedly leading the rioters. After the report's release, Tytler resigned from his post in the Ministry of Overseas Affairs and Kumar resigned from the Delhi Rural Development Board, but no formal punishment had been handed down by the end of the period covered by this report. The Government also set up two committees to disburse financial compensation promised by Prime Minister Singh to the victims' families. The Government approved an extra $158 million (7 billion INR) in compensation: $7,800 (350 thousand INR) for every family member killed and $2,800 (125 thousand INR) for those injured.

A formal judicial resolution to the 2002 Gujarat violence remained uncertain. However, there were significant developments during the period covered by this report, most notably convictions in the Best Bakery case. In February 2006, a Mumbai court gave life sentences to nine persons convicted for their role in the death of fourteen persons who took refuge in the bakery. All nine were among twenty-one individuals acquitted by a Vadodara fast-track court almost three years ago. Of the remaining twelve, eight were acquitted and four were "in hiding". In response to a supreme court mandate, in February 2006, the Gujarat police stated that it would reinvestigate 1,600 of the approximately 2,000 cases that were filed and closed in 2002. In March 2006, the Banarjee Commission report stated that the Godhra train fire was an accident.

The vast majority of Indians of every religious faith lived in peaceful coexistence; however, tensions between religious groups were a problem in some areas. While the Government took some steps, violence directed against minorities by both state and non-state actors occurred in several states.

Terrorists continued deadly attacks against religious targets. In July 2005, they attacked the Ram Hindu temple complex in Ayodhya. In October 2005, terrorists attacked markets throughout Delhi on the eve of the Hindu festival of Diwali and the Muslim Eid festival. In March 2006, terrorists also bombed Delhi's Jama Masjid mosque, injuring five, and a prominent Hindu temple in Varanasi, killing at least twenty-one and injuring sixty-two others. Terrorists also killed thirty-five Kashmiri Hindus in two massacres in May 2006.

Hindu-Muslim tension continued over disputed places of worship claimed by both groups to be sacred sites. There were instances of politically-manipulated religious tension in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh and Vadodara, Gujarat in early 2006. Police and state authorities took appropriate steps to end the violence and curb mob actions.

Conversion continued to be a highly contentious issue. Some Hindu organizations and others frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured converts, particularly from the lower castes, with offers of free education and healthcare, and equated such actions with forced conversions. Some Christian groups alleged that Hindu groups forcibly "reconverted" those who had embraced Christianity. Several state governments, most recently the Government of Rajasthan, enacted laws to criminalize coerced and/or fraudulent conversions. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) claimed some state governments used these laws to restrict voluntary conversions and to harass religious minorities.

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy and its consulates promoted religious freedom in their discussions with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials, and supported initiatives to encourage religious and communal harmony. During meetings with key leaders of all significant religious communities, U.S. officials discussed reports of ongoing harassment of minority groups, converts, and missionaries, explained U.S. Government policies around the world, and endeavored to better understand Indian religious attitudes towards the United States. Embassy officers continued to investigate and discuss religious freedom incidents of concern such as violence in Gujarat, the implementation and reversal of anti-conversion legislation, attacks on places of worship, caste-based discrimination, and the plight of internally displaced Hindu Kashmiris.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1.3 million square miles and a population of 1.03 billion. According to the 2001 Government census, Hindus constituted 80.5 percent of the population, Muslims 13.4 percent, Christians 2.3 percent, Sikhs 1.8 percent, and

others, including Buddhists, Jains, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Jews, and Baha'is, 1.1 percent. Slightly more than 90 percent of Muslims were Sunni; the rest were Shi'a. Buddhists included followers of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools, and there were both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians. Tribal groups (members of indigenous groups historically outside the caste system), which in government statistics generally were included among Hindus, often practiced traditional indigenous religions (animism). Hindus and Muslims were spread throughout the country, although large Muslim populations were found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala, and Muslims were the majority in Jammu and Kashmir. Christians were 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) had large Christian majorities. Sikhs were a majority in the state of Punjab.

The country's 200 million dalits (formerly called "untouchables"), constituted 21–25 percent of the population. However, it was difficult to accurately determine how many Indians fell within this category, since the Indian census did not ask respondents for caste status. Over the years, many lower caste Hindus, dalits, and non-Hindu tribal groups converted to other faiths to escape widespread discrimination and achieve higher social status. However, those from lower castes and dalits often continued to be viewed by both their new coreligionists and by Hindus through the prism of caste. Converts were regarded widely as retaining the caste of their ancestors, and caste identity, whether or not acknowledged by a person's own religion, had an effect on marriage prospects, social status, and economic opportunity. Historical stratification structures in the country also affect Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs, resulting in discrimination between coreligionists based on caste.

Immigrants, primarily from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, practiced various religions and tended to concentrate in the border regions near these countries.

According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, there were approximately one hundred registered foreign Christian missionaries (both Catholic and Protestant) in the country, most over the age of seventy. Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu missionaries also operated. Foreign rabbis also regularly visited and participated in religious ceremonies for the very small Jewish population, estimated at fewer than 5 thousand individuals.

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 restricted this freedom.

The country is a secular state with no official religion. The country's political system is federal, according state governments exclusive jurisdiction over law enforcement and the maintenance of order, which has limited the national government's capacity to deal directly with abuses of religious freedom. The country's national law enforcement agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), cannot investigate a crime committed in a state without the state government's permission. However, the 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 Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) held power in eight states. Its political platform called for the construction of a Hindu temple on the site of a mosque in Ayodhya destroyed by a Hindu mob in 1992; the repeal of Article 370 of the constitution, which grants special rights to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state; the enactment of a Uniform Civil Code that would apply to members of all religious groups; and the enactment of state-level anti-conversion legislation in all states in the country. The BJP was one of a number of offshoots of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist organization. The BJP, the RSS, and other affiliated organizations (collectively known as the Sangh Parivar) claimed to respect and tolerate other religious groups; however, the RSS in particular opposed conversions from Hinduism and believed that all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, should adhere to Hindu cultural values. The RSS has been implicated in incidents of violence and discrimination against Christians and Muslims.

The 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.

In January 2006, in an effort to build bridges with minority communities, the UPA Government set up a Ministry for Minority Affairs and appointed former Maharashtra Chief Minister, A. R. Antulay, as its first minister. The ministry's charter included overall policy planning, coordination, evaluation and review of the Government's regulatory and developmental programs intended to benefit minority communities.

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.

Although religious groups were not required to register with the Government, all foreigners, including missionaries, must register with the local police station before working in the country.

A number of federal and state laws regulate religious life in the country. These include the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) of 1976, several state anti-conversion laws, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act of 1967, the Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988, India's Foreigners Act of 1946, and the Indian Divorce Act of 1869.

The Government may ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in terrorism or sedition, or have violated the FCRA, which restricts the disbursement of foreign funds to missionaries and religious organizations, both foreign and local. Some organizations complained that the FCRA prevented them from properly financing humanitarian and educational activities.

The states of Arunchal Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa have laws against forcible conversions. Gujarat and Tamil Nadu have inactive anti-conversion laws or bills awaiting accompanying regulations needed for enforcement. In 2006, the Rajasthan state assembly passed a law against forcible conversion, which is pending approval by the governor and cabinet. However, the National Government can intervene to prevent states from taking action if it determines that such moves pose a threat to national integrity and communal harmony or violate the spirit of the constitution.

The Orissa Freedom of Religion Act of 1967 requires the state government to submit a monthly report specifying the number of conversions that have taken place in the state. It also requires that potential converts inform the district magistrate of pending conversions and that local police officers conduct an inquiry to determine whether a proposed conversion is legitimate and submit a report to state authorities. There were no reports of district magistrates denying permission for conversions or of convictions under OFRA during the period covered by this report.

Under current provisions in Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, a conversion offense is punishable with imprisonment for a maximum of two years, and a maximum fine of $220 (10 thousand INR).

The Gujarat anti-conversion law prohibits conversion by force or allurement; however, the law had not been implemented by the end of the period covered in this report.

On March 26, 2006, the Rajasthan State Assembly passed an anti-conversion bill, which continued to await approval by the state governor and ratification by the state cabinet. At the end of the reporting period, the bill could not be implemented since the governor had sent the bill to the president of the country for comment. The proposed law prohibits "conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or allurement or by other fraudulent means," and defines allurement as "any gift or gratification, either cash or kind."

Reportedly, there were approximately twenty arrests in Madhya Pradesh under the state's anti-conversion law during the reporting period. There were no convictions and all those arrested were released on bail. There were no available official figures for other states; however, reports from faith-based NGOs and the media indicated that there were four arrests in Andra Pradesh, fourteen in Chhattisgarh, twenty-eight in Madhya Pradesh, two in Orissa, and one in Uttar Pradesh during the period covered by this report.

In November 2004, the Government amended the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967 to correct excesses contained in the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), often criticized by Muslim groups as a tool used to target them. Despite its 2004 repeal, POTA contains a sunset feature, which gives the Central POTA Review Committee a year to review all existing POTA cases. This clause allows the Government to make new arrests if they are tied to existing POTA cases. The Government can issue a new indictment on a case opened years ago under POTA, even against a person never previously associated with the case. It can also extend the one-year limit for reviews. The UAPA empowers the Government to ban religious organizations that provoke intercommunity friction, have been involved in

terrorism or sedition, or violated the 1976 FCRA. The UAPA was applied intermittently and no religious organizations were banned under UAPA during the reporting period.

The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act of 1988 makes it an offense to use any religious site for political purposes or to harbor persons accused or convicted of crimes.

Since 2000, Uttar Pradesh's "Religious Buildings and Places Bill" has required a permit endorsed by the state government before the construction of any religious building.

Legislation in West Bengal requires a district magistrate's permission before the construction of a place of worship.

The Tamil Nadu Government continued to actively work to strengthen Hindu institutions. In 2005, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa extended the government-aided free meal program to include Christian churches. Previously, it was limited to Hindu temples and mosques.

There is no national law barring a citizen or foreigner from professing or propagating religious beliefs; however, speaking publicly against other beliefs is deemed dangerous to public order and is prohibited by the country's Foreigners Act. This act strictly prohibits visitors on tourist visas from religious preaching without permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Government forbids foreign missionaries of any faith from entering the country without prior clearance, and 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.

A number of cable and satellite television networks dedicated to religious programming operated in the country without difficulty.

In an attempt to combat communal violence, the Government introduced the Communal Violence (Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation of Victims) Bill of 2005 on November 26. If passed, the bill would double fines and prison terms, allocate funds for rehabilitation, and provide compensation to victims.

On May 5, 2005, to prevent communal forces from upsetting peace and harmony, parliament amended the Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 144 to allow district magistrates to ban the use of trishuls in any procession or gathering. In 2003, the Congress-led government in Rajasthan banned trishul distribution, while allowing their use in religious places and functions.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 lists offenses against disadvantaged persons and provides for stiff penalties for offenders; however, this act has had only a modest effect in curbing abuse due to victims' fears of retaliation if they accused high-caste members of committing atrocities. Intercaste violence was especially pronounced in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, and reportedly claimed hundreds of lives. Human rights NGOs alleged that caste violence, which crossed religious lines, remained at prior years' levels.

Article 17 of the constitution outlawed untouchability in 1950 and the Government continued to implement "reservations" for dalits in public sector employment and education. There were more than 50 percent "reservation" in some areas.

According to a 2004 NCM report, 24 percent of government jobs were reserved for members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, including dalits. Benefits accorded dalits were revoked once they converted to Christianity or Islam, but not to Buddhism or Sikhism.

Christian groups filed a court case demanding that converts to Christianity and Islam enjoy the same access to "reservations" as other dalits. The case was appealed to the supreme court, which had not ruled by the end of the period covered by this report.

On January 4, 2006, the supreme court upheld an earlier high court decision to provide a five percent quota for Muslims in education and government jobs in Andra Pradesh. The new "reservations" increased the number of reserved jobs and positions in educational institutions to 51 percent and excluded Muslims who had already benefited from "reservations" or who were successful in their own right. Previously, the state had added Muslims to its list of backward classes, which included castes and classes not included in the constitution that, while not subject to systematic caste discrimination, have less social mobility and economic advantages than other castes. This category included former untouchables who converted from Hinduism to other religions, nomads, and tribes people.

Although the constitution specifies that the Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh faiths are different from the Hindu religion, interpretations by Hindu nationalist groups have defined them as Hindu sects. Such interpretations have been contentious, particularly for the Sikh community, many of whose leaders viewed Sikhism as a unique

religion, distinct from Hinduism. Sikhs have sought a separately codified body of law to recognize this distinction legally and preclude ambiguity. 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, although the NCM in May 2006 stated again that Jains and Kashmiri Pandits should be accorded minority status. The court decreed that increasing social divisions along religious lines would be detrimental, and the country, which was already heavily stratified by class, should attempt to move away from such separation.

There are different personal status laws for the various minority religious communities, and the legal system accommodates religion-specific laws in matters of marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. Muslim personal status law governs many non-criminal matters, including family law and inheritance.

On May 2, 2005, in response to concerns about the improper use of the triple talaq (the ability of a husband to divorce his wife by repeating, "I divorce thee" three times), the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) adopted new talaq guidelines, stating that men should use a reversible single talaq followed by a three-month waiting period known as the iddat. The guidelines also call for the husband to pay compensation to the wife's family in case of divorce, equality in property rights, protection against physical and emotional abuse of wives by their husbands, and assurances that remarried women will be able to maintain contact with their families.

In April 2006, the supreme court overruled a fatwa (decree) issued by local clerics which demanded that, against their will, a couple live separately after an inebriated husband gave talaq to his wife. The Jamiat ul Ulema (religious leaders) threatened to excommunicate the couple if they remained together, and criticized the supreme court for hurting Muslim religious sentiments after it intervened in the case.

The AIMPLB asserted that fatwas are only opinions and therefore are not binding on any person in an attempt to convince the supreme court that a legal prohibition against the issuance of fatwas was not necessary.

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 ten 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 supreme court ruled that the Government can 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 their own 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.

In 2003, the West Bengal Government brought the undergraduate and post-graduate sections of madrassahs under the higher education department of the state while promising to extend college status to the Calcutta Madrassah. The Government also decreed that the state's Public Service Commission would hire madrassah teachers and introduced new subjects like economics, computer science, and political science into their curriculum.

In the country, school textbooks were published by the Government's National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) and were uniformly used in government and private schools and printed in various languages. In March 2005, the Government released new NCERT textbooks which they asserted were more accurate and restored the secular character of education.

In June 2004, an NCERT panel reviewed forty-seven new textbooks prepared by the Directorate of Education in Delhi and determined that they had poor content, shoddy presentation, and significant amounts of irrelevant information. It recommended that the books not be introduced until the defects were corrected, which, according to NCERT, would be ready by the 2007–2008 academic year. NCERT, upon a recommendation from the NCM, also withdrew four textbooks during the year for "factual distortions."

In July 2005, the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) released a report on textbooks used in schools that did not follow the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) syllabus and were not approved by NCERT. The report stated that some textbooks used in private schools affiliated with religious bodies propagated a narrow, often communal view of the world. In October 2005, the Human Resource Development Ministry proposed the creation of a National Textbook Council to monitor school textbooks produced outside of the NCERT system. By the end of the reporting period, the council had not been formed.

On December 16, 2004, parliament passed a bill creating the National Commission for Minority Education Institutions to resolve disputes involving allegations of discrimination against minority schools. In March 28, 2006, a legislative act empowered the commission to investigate complaints regarding violations of minority rights, including the right to establish and administer educational institutions.

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. In March and April 2006, the Rajasthan Government banned the books "Haqeeqat" (The Truth) and "Ve Sharm Se Hindu Kahate Hain Kyon?" (Why do they say with shame they are Hindus?) because they disparaged Hinduism.

In September 2005, the Calcutta High Court lifted the ban on "Split in Two" in response to a petition by the Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR).

The board continued to refuse a censor certificate to the film "Chand Buz Gaya," featuring a character resembling controversial Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi.

The major holy days of the country's major religious groups are considered national holidays, including Good Friday and Christmas (Christian); the two Eids (Muslim); Lord Buddha's birthday (Buddhist); Guru Nanak's Birthday (Sikh); Dussehra, Diwali and Holi (Hindu); and the Birthday of Lord Mahavir (Jain).

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 in February 2006 for the third time. In 2001, the Government banned the Muslim group Deendar Anjuman for "fomenting communal tension" and actions "prejudicial to India's security." In 2003, the Government extended the ban for another two years, and in 2005, extended it until 2007.

In April 2006, the Government of Gujarat refused to renew the service contract of five Catholic nuns, whose order had been caring for lepers in a government hospital for fifty-seven years.

Legislation in West Bengal requires a district magistrate's permission before construction of a place of worship. Anyone intending to convert a personal place of worship into a public one is also required to obtain the district magistrate's permission.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of widespread distribution of trishuls, a Hindu symbol that was sometimes used to intimidate non-Hindus. In May 2005, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal handed out approximately 500 trishuls at a ceremony in Nimapara, Orissa.

In 2005, the Kerala Bar Council's Enrollment Committee denied membership to two nuns and a priest, arguing that it could not grant membership to those in religious vocations. The Kerala High Court ruled against the committee on November 7, 2005, stating that religious vocation could not disqualify an individual from practicing law.

The Congress Party of Assam set aside thirty-four state assembly tickets for Muslim candidates during the period covered by this report. In January 2005, the Assam Congress Minority Cell demanded that the party allot at least three additional tickets to Christian candidates. Christians comprised 4 percent of Assam's population and had no "reservations."

In 2003, the Tamil Nadu Government ordered the Christian Medical College of Vellore to accept government-sponsored candidates into 40 percent of its school seats, in violation of constitutional guarantees given to unaided minority institutions. The supreme court, while permitting the hospital to follow its prior admission policy, directed the Government of Tamil Nadu to form a committee to look into the question of admission procedures followed by privately funded minority education institutions. In 2004, the state government constituted a committee, but the supreme court had not issued a verdict by the end of the reporting period.

In January 2005, the Gujarat Charity Commissioner sent letters mainly to Christian faith-based charities asking for their financial statements from the preceding ten years, claiming that he was acting at the behest of the Government of Gujarat. The law governing charities only requires the submission of annual reports. Most charities objected to the measure and were excused.

Unlike in previous years, the Gujarat police conducted no illegal surveys of Christians during the period covered by this report.

During the period covered by this report, press reports documented the activities of Christian missionaries who entered on tourist visas and illegally proselytized. Their activities led to a public outcry and calls for the Government to enforce existing laws more rigidly. U.S. citizens accused of religious preaching while visiting the

country as tourists were expelled and faced difficulties obtaining permission to return for up to a decade after the event.

On June 11, 2005, residents of a slum in a Mumbai suburb assaulted four missionaries leading a vacation Bible school. The four departed the country on June 12. No formal charges were filed for the assault or against the missionaries for violating the FCRA. On June 13, four other missionaries with tourist rather than missionary visas were deported for conducting religious activities.

On October 18, 2005, the Times of India reported that a mob attacked two Americans in the Antantnag district of Kashmir who were preaching Christianity. Police intervened and rescued them.

Workers from Christian relief organizations continued to report that bureaucratic obstacles prevented them from renewing their visas.

Missionaries and foreign religious organizations must comply with the FCRA, which limits overseas assistance to certain NGOs, including ones with religious affiliations. There were no reports of religious-based relief operations related to the 2004 tsunami being hampered by the requirement.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While the National Government has not been implicated in 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. Weak enforcement of laws protecting religious freedom was partly due to an overburdened, outmoded, and corrupt judiciary. The legal system had many years of backlog, and all but the most prominent cases moved slowly.

A federal system in which state governments have jurisdiction over law and order within their borders contributed to the National Government's ineffectiveness in combating religiously based violence directly. The only national law enforcement agency, the CBI, is required to secure state government permission before investigating a crime in the affected state. States often delayed or refused to grant such permission.

Although discrimination based on caste is officially illegal, it remained ubiquitous, stratifying almost every segment of society. Many members of lower castes were relegated to the most menial of jobs and had little social mobility, although a segment of the lower castes had achieved success in many fields of endeavor. Some dalits and other low caste members converted in an attempt to escape caste-based discrimination.

In October 2004, Amnesty International (AI) called for the perpetrators of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence that occurred after the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards to be brought to justice. AI stated that only a small minority of police officers responsible for the 1984 human rights violations had been prosecuted.

In 2004, persons involved in the 1984 riots were sentenced to three years' imprisonment for looting. In May 2005, a Delhi court sentenced five individuals to life imprisonment for murder and, also in May, the Delhi High Court ruled that the Government was liable for its failure to "protect the life and liberty of its citizens" and must pay $2,860 (123,000 INR) to all persons injured during the riots, an increase from the previous amount of $46 (2,000 INR) per victim. In another riot-related case which had not come to trial by the end of reporting period, on June 28, 2005, a Delhi city court charged five men for stabbing a Sikh policeman, his son, and another relative.

The Nanavati commission, tasked with conducting a re-inquiry into the massacre, released its report in August 2005. It cited several prominent Congress party leaders for complicity in the violence and highlighted law enforcement culpability in the deaths due to a deliberate lack of action. It noted that only one policeman was convicted for committing atrocities during the riots. Minister Jagdish Tytler and Member of Parliament Sajjan Kumar were indicted in the report. Tytler resigned from parliament and Kumar resigned from the Delhi Rural Development Board after its release, but at year's end no formal punishment resulted from the report. The Government set up two committees to provide compensation to the victims' families. However, during the reporting period, the NCM criticized the Government for failure to open cases against Tytler, Kumar, or any police officers on duty during the riots.

The Home Ministry reported that a communal riot, which took place between May and October 2005 in Mau, Uttar Pradesh, left seven persons dead and thirty-six injured, including eight police officers. On October 17, 2005, the Uttar Pradesh Government convened a three-member committee to determine the cause of the riots. On October 19, 2005, the police filed charges against BJP politicians Mukhtar Ansari and Ramji Singh for inciting communal discord. The Government instituted

a curfew on the town and directed paramilitary forces to the area to stop the violence. On November 20, 2005, the committee reported that BJP Member of Parliament Yogi Adityanath had a role in instigating the communal clashes, but no charges were filed against him by the end of the period covered by this report.

Outbreaks of politically-manipulated religious tension in Uttar Pradesh and Vadodara, Gujarat, in early 2006 did not spread after police and state authorities took timely steps to end the violence and curb mob actions.

In April 2006, communal clashes between Hindu and Muslim residents of Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, stemming from the use of loudspeakers during a religious festival resulted in two deaths and eight injuries. An NCM investigation determined that the Uttar Pradesh administration initially did not take appropriate steps to prevent the violence. The police have launched a judicial inquiry.

On May 1, 2006, despite the Muslim community's request that authorities preserve a 300-year-old shrine in Vadodara, Gujarat, and declare it a heritage site, the Vadodara Municipal Corporation demolished the shrine, alleging that it obstructed traffic. While attempting to disperse a mob that had gathered to protest the demolition, the Gujarat police killed two Muslims. In reaction, members of the Muslim community threw stones and set four shops on fire. On May 1, 2006, the Home Ministry asked the Gujarat Government to control the situation, and deployed paramilitary forces to assist local security personnel. On May 3, 2006, the Government applied a curfew and deployed the army. The NCM urged the state government to ascertain if police firing was unavoidable and if the decision to destroy the shrine was justified. The media reported that six persons were killed and forty-two injured, sixteen as a result of police fire, and that on May 3, 2006, a crowd defying the curfew killed a Muslim man by setting him on fire.

In February 2005, activists from the Hindu nationalist Bajrang Dal attacked and beat a group of Christians in Kota, Rajasthan, while attending a Christian graduation ceremony, and subsequently set up checkpoints to harass Christians attempting to leave by bus. The victims claimed that the local government sided with the attackers, and allowed assaults against 275 persons. The district government stated it ended the harassment and arrested thirty-seven Bajrang Dal members. A two-person NCM team investigated the incident and negotiated a peace agreement.

In February 2006, members of the Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena forced their way into a church belonging to Emmanuel Ministries International (EMI), a Christian charitable institution, in Kota, Rajasthan, and burned an effigy of its founder on the rooftop. Local Hindus alleged that EMI used monetary inducements and charity to encourage conversions and distributed the book, "Haqeeqat," (The Truth) to denigrate Hinduism. Hindu nationalists in Rajasthan publicized the alleged connection between EMI, the offensive book, and conversions, and pressed for anti-conversion legislation in the state assembly.

EMI officials asserted that, while their library had a copy of Haqeeqat, they did not condone its offensive message and have since removed the book. Numerous sources in Rajasthan contradicted EMI's claim regarding the book and asserted that EMI deliberately distributed it widely. Authorities held EMI President Samuel Thomas in judicial custody from March 17 to May 2, 2006, when he was released on bail, under a law that criminalizes hurting the religious sentiments of any religion. Thomas was later charged with sedition on May 14, 2006, for the use of a map on an EMI affiliated website that did not include Jammu and Kashmir as part of the country. EMI asserted that the charges constituted ongoing harassment by the state government.

In February 2006, the Rajasthan state Government froze all EMI assets, citing the group for its failure to properly file its tax documents. However, on June 26, 2006, the Jaipur High Court overturned the state government's actions and ruled that all EMI bank accounts be opened. Human rights groups noted that such tax errors were commonplace.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 15, 2006, in Kasa, Maharashtra, policemen verbally and physically abused four tribal Christians who tried to follow up on a First Information Report (FIR) lodged on June 8, 2006. The FIR alleged that members of the local Tribal Welfare Committee assaulted Christians. Subsequently, the four were charged with breach of the peace. Following a complaint by a human rights organization, a police inquiry into the case was ordered, resulting in the removal of one police officer. No further action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 16, 2006, in Bathinda, Punjab, a group of approximately five Hindu extremists led by the RSS broke up an Easter Day event at the home of a member of the "House of Prayer," an independent Christian denomination, warning its members not to hold further meetings and vandalizing some of the property. When the pastor attempted to register a FIR, the Senior

Superintendent of Police (SSP) reprimanded him for his Christian activities and told him that he required permission from the district magistrate to hold this event. On May 4, 2006, after Delhi All-India Christian Council (AICC) leaders contacted the superintendent, he recanted and permitted the services. Two Shiv Sena members and another man were arrested for the raid, but were released the same day.

In the Balmikinagar jungles bordering Nepal, police and the RSS accused missionaries and Oraon tribal Christians of "links" with the Maoist Communist Center (MCC). As a result, in June 2005, police detained and questioned two priests regarding alleged MCC ties, while ordering others to leave the area. During the previous reporting period, police detained more than one hundred Oraon tribespeople, expelling a number of them from the area. There were no reports of further detentions during the year.

There was continued concern about the failure of the Gujarat Government to arrest and convict those responsible for the widespread communal violence in 2002 following the burning in Godhra of the Sabarmati Express train, in which fifty-nine men, women, and children died. Home Ministry figures released in May 2005 indicated that, in the days following the train burning, 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, and 2,500 others were injured. Some NGOs maintained the number of Muslims killed was higher than official estimates, with figures ranging anywhere from 1,000 to 2,500 dead. There were also reports that Muslim women were subjected to rape, gang rape, and molestation. Reportedly, approximately 10 thousand families continued to be internally displaced and government-provided services remained inadequate.

In March 2006, a government-established commission headed by Justice Banerjee determined that the train fire was an accident rather than a criminal conspiracy, as alleged by the Government of Gujarat. The report categorically ruled out a Muslim conspiracy, noting that local Muslims helped douse the fire. The commission also reported that the then railway minister and the Railway Safety Commission failed to adequately investigate the possibility that the fire was accidental. The Gujarat Government rejected the report, and the VHP accused the Banerjee Commission of political bias. Legal challenges to the commission still pending in the Gujarat High Court have prevented the release of its report to parliament.

The Government of Gujarat established the Nanavati-Shah judicial commission to investigate the train fire and the subsequent violence, but the supreme court stayed its report in May and by the end of the period covered by this report, the report had not been made public.

In February 2006, in response to a supreme court inquiry, the state government ordered the reopening of 1,242 of 2,108 cases that the Government had dropped because it could not substantiate the charges. The Gujarat police pledged to reinvestigate 1,600 cases. The total number of cases registered in connection with the Gujarat violence was 4,256.

According to the Gujarat police chief, 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 more cases during the reporting period because of lack of evidence or changes in testimony.

In 2005, the Government of Gujarat established "fast track" courts to overcome delays and ensure access to justice for riot victims, resulting in some convictions. On October 24, 2005, five persons were sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of a Muslim youth in Halol and for the murder of eleven Muslims in the Panchmahal district of Gujarat during the riot period. Others were sentenced to three years' imprisonment and ordered to pay a fine of $11 (500 INR) each. A local court acquitted 107 of 113 persons arrested for killing 2 Muslims in the post-Godhra riots and, in February 2006, a local court indicted 39 police officers for riot-related conduct.

In April 2004, the supreme court ordered the retrial of the Bilkis Bano case and Best Bakery case in Mumbai courts outside the purview of the Government of Gujarat. It also stayed the trial of ten other major cases until the two retrials were completed. There were no developments in the Bilkis Bano case during the period covered by this report and on February 24, 2006, a special court in Mumbai convicted nine persons of the murder of fourteen Muslims in the Best Bakery case and sentenced them to life in prison. The court acquitted another eight accused in connection with the case.

Many human rights groups continued to argue that, despite the Best Bakery verdict, those responsible for the 2002 Gujarat violence would go unpunished.

On June 22, 2005, Central 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.

Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of intimidation and harassment of witnesses during the reporting period.

In March 2005, Gujarat police detained at least 400 persons to prevent Hindu-Muslim clashes during the Shi'ite Muslim day of mourning (Muharram); the same month, Muslims called off a Muharram procession in Vadodara to prevent potential clashes with Hindus. No updates on these events were available during the reporting period.

Since an organized insurgency erupted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, there have been numerous reports of human rights abuses by security forces and local officials, including execution-style killings, beatings, rapes, and other physical abuse. Terrorist groups have also perpetrated atrocities against civilians, including car bombings, forced housing of terrorists, executions, and sexual assaults. Retaliatory killings by terrorists were also common. Terrorists have also routinely targeted and killed minority Hindu members of the Pandit (Hindu Brahmin) community since 1989, resulting in their mass exodus from Kashmir to refugee camps in Jammu or other parts of the country. On April 30 and May 1, 2006, terrorists rounded up and shot thirty-five Hindu residents of remote Jammu villages. The executions were allegedly punishment for the villagers' participation in the April 24, 2006, state assembly elections.

Government forces denied allegations of excessive use of force and asserted that they targeted persons not on the basis of religion but of involvement in terrorist activity or suspicion of terrorist links. For their part, terrorists killed and otherwise attacked hundreds of Hindu and Muslim civilians, including Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus, during the period covered by this report.

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 Jammu and Kashmir police force of 61 thousand was Muslim. Kashmiri Hindus remained vulnerable to violence. Most lived in refugee camps outside of the valley awaiting safe return. In 2003, for the first time in fourteen years, the Jammu and Kashmir Government allowed a procession of separatist groups to mark the anniversary of the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. It was held again in May 2004 and 2005.

Forced Religious Conversion

Four states have laws in place banning forced religious conversion. Three other states have inactive laws or bills that await accompanying regulations before they can be enforced. Some NGOs claimed state governments used these laws to restrict voluntary conversions and to harass religious minorities. The issue of conversion, especially to Christianity, was highly contentious in the country. Hindu nationalist organizations frequently alleged that Christian missionaries lured Hindus, particularly from lower castes, with offers of free education and healthcare and equated such actions with forced conversions. Christians denied this, responding that low-caste Hindus convert of their own free will and that efforts by Hindu groups to "reconvert" these new Christians to Hinduism were themselves coercive. Arrests under these laws occurred during the reporting period in several states. All arrested were Christians. The Christian community contended that the anti-conversion laws were applied in a discriminatory manner and only enforced when a person converted from Hinduism to another religion.

Religious press outlets reported that, in August 2004, Pastor Subas Samal and an associate were arrested under Orissa's anti-conversion law and spent six weeks in jail after leading a group of Christians in Orissa back to their village, from which they had been expelled by their non-Christian neighbors. The pastor claimed he had attempted to end the conflict and had never forced anyone to convert.

In February 2005, the NCM urged the Governments of Rajasthan and Maharashtra to immediately stop forced reconversions of Christians and to protect Christians and their property. The action was in response to an attack on Christians in Kota and calls by "Hindutva" supporters for a social boycott against Christians who refused to reconvert.

On May 1, 2005, the press reported that the VHP in Bargarh, Orissa, reconverted 567 Christians. The reconverted reportedly had signed affidavits declaring their intention to change their faith in keeping with the provisions of the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act. A Christian community leader in Orissa asserted that the reconversion was not genuine and was staged by the VHP to keep the communal issue alive. Religious press reported that approximately 600 Christian dalit tribespeople converted to Hinduism in Bijepur, Orissa, due to VHP pressure.

On May 14, 2005, four Christian missionaries were arrested in Brajarajnagar, Orissa, and charged with forced conversion. They accused the missionaries of using

offers of financial assistance to propagate Christianity. The missionaries had not received permission to perform conversions in the area, but were released the following day.

Religious press outlets reported that on July 10, 2005, police detained thirty-five members of the Gosner Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh, for performing forced conversions. All were released on July 11, 2005, but a FIR was filed against two women.

Religious press outlets reported that on July 19, 2005, police arrested a Christian couple under the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (MPFRA) after their neighbors accused them of engaging in "fraudulent conversion" activities. They released the couple on bail within twenty-four hours and were awaiting trial at the end of the period covered by this report. On August 21, 2005, a mob targeting the couple injured approximately ten persons, including women and a two-year-old child.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 26, 2005, the pastor and eight members of a church in Durg, Chhattisgarh, were convicted of fraudulent conversion activities for offering money to Hindus willing to convert.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 11, 2005, police arrested Sunny John under MPFRA for allegedly engaging in fraudulent conversions of children from poor Hindu families. John, who runs three schools, was accused of converting eleven children between the ages of five and ten.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 15, 2005, Hindu extremists attacked the annual convention of a church in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, alleging that the organizers had kidnapped tribespeople for conversion. Police interrogated the tribespeople, who denied the reports. Police did not press charges.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 18, 2005, police arrested Pastor Masih Das Rai under the Freedom of Religion Act for performing forcible conversions in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Members of a Hindu extremist group attacked the pastor and twelve members of his church prior to the arrest. Despite two applications for bail, Pastor Rai remained in police custody at the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 16, 2006, approximately fifteen Hindu extremists attacked Pastor Kulamani Mallick, his wife, and child, and set fire to their home in Matiapada, Orissa. The extremists beat other Christians in the village and destroyed seven houses, six of which belonged to Christians. Pastor Mallick and his cousin were subsequently arrested under the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act. Five men were charged with starting the fires and destroying property.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 24, 2006, a group of up to 200 Hindu extremists assaulted Pastor Ram Prakash and a number of others for allegedly converting local persons to Christianity in Ramchandrapur, Uttar Pradesh. Prakash was arrested when he called the police to report the attack. Reportedly, he was beaten while in police custody. Prakash was released on bail, but was rearrested for encouraging communal tension.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 26, 2006, police arrested three Christian leaders belonging to the Church of the Nazarene in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, under MPFRA, and charged them with forced conversion of tribespeople. According to an NGO, the arrests were based on the affidavits of twenty-three non-Christian tribespeople asserting that they were forced by the leaders to attend a Christian convention. The NGO contended that the affidavits were themselves coerced by the police.

Religious press outlets reported that on March 17, 2006, a group of men interrupted a prayer meeting in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, reportedly questioning the participants, injuring six and "sexually molesting" female trainees. The attackers were also alleged to have destroyed Bibles and damaged property. Police detained five attackers, who were later released on bail, and registered a case against the sponsor under MPFRA.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 5, 2006, in Naudara Bridge, Madhya Pradesh, a Methodist high school was attacked by extremists who accused the staff of forced conversions after a former teacher filed a case of forcible conversion against three staff members. The Madhya Pradesh State Minorities Commission determined the accusation to be false.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 7, 2006, in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, extremists beat approximately twenty-five Christians protesting the arrest of seven Christians under MPFRA. The attackers reportedly injured at least seven Christians while police watched. No action was taken against the perpetrators.

The AICC reported on April 20, 2006, that police arrested two Christian women for attempting to convert persons in the Jabalpur district of Madhya Pradesh. The local superintendent of police alleged that the two women were distributing material

urging Hindus to follow the Bible. The Christian press also reported that on April 18, 2006, police arrested Avinash Lal, an independent Pentecostal pastor, and six other Christian leaders in the same Madhya Pradesh district for conversion by allurement and conducting illegal religious gatherings.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 1, 2006, in Gwarighat, Madhya Pradesh, police arrested a social worker, Sunil Kumar Rao, of forcibly converting children to Christianity in violation of the state anti-conversion law. He was released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 2, 2006, in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, assailants attacked Pastor Andreas Soni, a Pentecostal pastor, as he distributed Christian literature. Subsequently, the police arrested him under the state anti-conversion law. He was later released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 14, 2006, in Gaur Nadi, Madhya Pradesh, approximately fifty members of the Dharam Jagran Sena attacked a church, beat a church member who had just converted to Christianity, assaulted the pastor, and ordered him to stop converting persons to Christianity. The attackers accused the church of undertaking forcible conversions and filed a formal complaint against the pastor at the police station. He was detained under MPFRA and was released after local Christians paid his bail fee.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 18, 2006, in Kosa Nala, Chhattisgarh, approximately twenty-five members of the Dharam Jagran Sena raided the Hosanna Church during a service and physically assaulted Pastor David Raj and his wife. The assailants then took the pastor to the police station where police detained him and arrested his wife, charging them with forced conversions. The couple was released on bail but had to report regularly to the police for the duration of their case, which was still pending by the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 25, 2006, in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, a large mob threatened four Missionaries of Charity nuns distributing food to impoverished patients at the Ruya Hospital and accused them of converting persons to Christianity. Police subsequently arrested the four nuns and released them after several hours at the behest of the local diocesan bishop. A case was registered against those who threatened the nuns.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

Throughout the period covered by this report, Jammu and Kashmir continued to be a focus of terrorist violence. Terrorist adherents to a violent strain of Islam committed atrocities against Hindus and other Muslims, and security forces used targeted but at times excessive force to suppress them, with civilians frequently the main victims. The deaths of suspected terrorists, almost all of whom were Muslim, occurred frequently in police custody, although the government of Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad was working to improve human rights practices. Islamist terrorists forced the overwhelming majority of Hindu Kashmiri Pandits to flee their ancestral homes in the Kashmir Valley in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although 6,000 Pandits remained, more than several hundred thousand have left since violence against Hindus began in Jammu and Kashmir in the late 1980s. During the conflict, terrorists demolished ancient Hindu temples, destroyed religious artifacts, and desecrated Hindu religious sites throughout the Kashmir valley.

In May 2005, terrorists threw grenades at a Christian school in Srinagar, killing two women and wounding sixty persons, including twenty-five children.

On May 22, 2005, militants detonated bombs at two movie theaters in New Delhi, killing one and injuring sixty during the screening of the Hindi film Jo Bole So Nihal. Sikh groups objected to the film, stating that it negatively portrayed members of their religion. On May 31, 2005, police announced the arrest of two Sikhs in Punjab on suspicion of carrying out the attacks. Police reported that the two men were members of the Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) terrorist group.

On July 5, 2005, suspected Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LET) terrorists attacked a makeshift Hindu temple erected amidst the ruins of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. Indian security forces protecting the site killed all the attackers.

Terrorists bombed the Jama Masjid, the country's largest mosque located in Old Delhi, injuring approximately a dozen persons in two explosions that took place in quick succession on April 16, 2006. No group claimed responsibility.

LET terrorists killed at least thirty-five Hindus on April 30 and May 1, 2006, in Jammu and Kashmir. Terrorists struck two remote Hindu-dominated mountain villages in Doda district, some 100 miles northeast of Jammu, and shot and killed twenty-two Hindus. On the same day, the bodies of nine Hindus were recovered from neighboring Udhampur district. Police stated the dead were Hindu cattle herders reportedly kidnapped by suspected terrorists on April 30, 2006.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the UPA introduced legislation that would 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.

The Government acted forcibly to prosecute those responsible for the Godhra attacks and win proper compensation for the victims of the Delhi anti-Sikh riots.

After the Mumbai terrorist attacks, the prime minister and others deliberately stated that it was not a case of "Muslim terrorism," told the nation to respect and protect innocent Muslims, and praised Muslims for their patriotism.

The Government acted systematically to remove "tainted" textbooks with communal bias from schools and introduce secular, more objective textbooks that seriously examine atrocities committed against minorities in the country.

In Rajasthan, opposition parties marched with Christians and Muslims to protest the BJP-sponsored anti-conversion bill, and the Government condemned it.

Speeches by the prime minister and some state government officials promoted communal harmony and the Government drafted a model comprehensive law to deal with communal violence, appointed activists to high-level positions responsible for minority concerns, created a Commission for Minority Educational Institutions to improve minority access to education, established a national commission to determine effective ways to improve the social welfare of religious minorities, and created a new Ministry for Minority affairs.

The UPA Government continued efforts to make statements and implement campaign promises to improve religious tolerance.

The NHRC and NCM continued to promote freedom of religion during the period covered by this report. Through their annual reports and investigations, they focused attention on human rights problems and, where possible, encouraged judicial resolutions.

In September 2005, the NCM convened a meeting between prominent Hindu and Muslim leaders to promote communal harmony and deepen understanding and trust among their communities.

The NHRC also directed the Gujarat state Government to entrust the investigation of certain Gujarat cases to the CBI, to support NGOs working on behalf of religious minorities and to reform the police.

On May 19, 2005, the Orissa High Court commuted Dara Singh's death sentence to life imprisonment, upheld the life sentence decision for one of his accomplices, Mahendra Hembram, and acquitted the other eleven defendants in the case of the killing of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two minor sons. Singh has been charged with three other murders and continued to face trial in those cases. In October 2005, the supreme court accepted an appeal by Dara Singh against his conviction and life sentence, and also accepted the CBI's appeal seeking capital punishment. The supreme court had not heard either appeal by the end of the period covered by this report.

In August 2005, the Government of Maharashtra amended its 2000 State Minorities Commission Bill to stipulate that the commission present its annual report to the state parliament and required parliament to report on actions taken as a result of the commission's findings.

In response to the communal violence in Vadodara, the supreme court on May 4, 2006, overturned a Gujarat High Court order directing all municipal corporations in the state to demolish places of religious worship that were obstructing roads. The supreme court's order stopped the ongoing demolitions in Vadodara in order to prevent the destruction of other mosques and the resulting communal friction. The supreme court argued that the Gujarat court had directed the police and other authorities "to take immediate steps to remove encroachments by religious structures on public space without discrimination, and submit their reports." The Government also noted that the removal of religious structures was intrinsically sensitive, and must be subjected to scrutiny and classification before demolition.

Journalists and numerous NGOs noted that the Government's response to the Vadodara violence was much improved over its 2002 post-Godhra reaction. Journalists noted that the Gujarat Government quickly appealed for peace and local BJP leaders did not make provocative statements as they did in 2002.

On August 11, 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued an apology in parliament to the Sikh community as well as the nation for the massacre of an estimated 2,700 Sikhs during the 1984 riots following then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination. Singh's apology followed the resignation of two Congress party leaders from public offices after being indicted by an official commission that probed the anti-Sikh riots that occurred twenty-one years ago.

The NHRC on May 15, 2006, ordered the Punjab Government to disburse a monetary relief of $5,700 (250 thousand INR) each to the next of kin of forty-five persons whom the state government admitted were in police custody immediately before they were killed and illegally cremated. The Government, with the assistance of relatives and NGOs, identified 1,296 illegally cremated bodies.

The cabinet, on June 24, 2006, approved a new fifteen-point program to prevent and control communal incidents and take care of minorities' welfare and funded programs for minorities. The revised program is also designed to prevent communal riots, facilitate prosecution of communal offences, and help rehabilitate riot victims.

The Government acted to implement a National Action Plan for Human Rights Education, adopted in 2005, to promote awareness of human rights. Specific target groups include schools, colleges and universities, government officials, the armed forces, prison officials and law officers. The Ministry of Home Affairs held five seminars at Chennai, Calcutta, Delhi, Mumbai, and Bhopal, which were attended by a large number of NGOs working in the field of human rights police officers and civil servants. The Government also introduced human rights courses as a part of the training curriculum for the Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, National Police Academy, and Police Training Colleges.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Despite incidents of violence and discrimination during the period covered by this report, relations between various religious groups generally were amicable among the substantial majority of citizens. Efforts at ecumenical understanding brought religious leaders together to defuse religious tensions. 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.

However, animosities within and between religious communities have roots that are centuries old, and these tensions, exacerbated by poverty, class, and ethnic differences, erupted into periodic violence. The Government made some effort, not always successfully, to prevent these incidents and to restore communal harmony; however, tensions between Hindus and Muslims and between Hindus and Christians continued to pose a challenge to the concepts of secularism, tolerance, and diversity on which the country was founded.

The Home Ministry reported that during 2005, "the communal situation in the country, by and large, remained under control during the current year. No major communal incident was reported from any part of the country, except the one incident at Mau town in Uttar Pradesh on October 14, 2005, involving a confrontation over the holding of a procession and the use of loudspeakers by Hindus during the Bharat Milap programme, which claimed ten lives. The situation was, however, brought under control."

Hindus and Muslims continue to feud over mosques constructed centuries ago on sites where Hindus believed temples stood previously.

Extremist Hindu groups such as the VHP and Bajrang Dal maintained that they intended to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya on the site of the 500-year-old Babri Mosque demolished by a Hindu mob in 1992, with or without the Government's approval. In March 2003, the supreme court denied the Government's application to rescind a ban on religious activity at the site, whereupon then Prime Minister Vajpayee promised to continue with plans to build a temple where the razed mosque had stood.

Secular groups continued to protest the Sangh Parivar's attempts over the past decade to take control of the Sufi syncretic (Hindu-Muslim) shrine known as Guru Dattatreya Baba Budan Swami Dargah at Chikmagalur in Karnataka. The centuries-old shrine is believed to have been one of the earliest centers of Sufism in the south. In recent years, Hindus have held many festivals at the site, alienating local Muslims. In October 2005, the Karnataka Government banned a controversial Hindu religious ceremony at the shrine. However, human rights groups stated that the coalition government that took office in February 2006, with the BJP as one of its partners, would continue to support attempts by Hindu groups to take control of the shrine.

In early February 2005 and 2006, Hindu-Muslim tension escalated in the town of Dhar in Madhya Pradesh after Hindus and Muslims attempted to simultaneously pray at a disputed site called "Bhojshala." Hindu worshipers resisted violent attempts by the local administration to stop them from hanging the picture of a Hindu goddess at the site. The administration then brought in police to quell the violence.

Tensions died down after local police forces convinced the two groups to offer prayers at different times of the day and instituted a curfew.

A July 2004 Urdu press report highlighted the Muslim community's sensitivity to threats to their religious sites. The report claimed the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) planned to move the Sidha Jama mosque, located on a national highway in Midnapore, West Bengal, to make way for road expansion. When the NHAI started proceedings to acquire the land under the Land Acquisition Act, local Muslims approached the West Bengal Minorities Commission to prevent the relocation. When the NHAI did not respond to commission requests for information, Muslims took the case to the Calcutta High Court, which ordered the mosque to be moved "in the public interest." In their appeal, Muslims stated that they feared the order would create a precedent allowing the relocation of mosques across the country.

The same report alleged that airport authorities in Calcutta wanted to acquire another area where a mosque, madrassah, tomb of a saint, and a graveyard were situated, to extend the airport. No action was taken on this case and it remained pending in the courts.

In the second week of September 2004, the VHP led an unsuccessful attempt to demolish the tomb of a seventeenth century Muslim warrior in Pratapgarh in Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra. During the agitation, several Muslim families left their homes, fearing violence, but later returned. The state police moved swiftly to prevent violence and showed no anti-Muslim bias.

Instances of Hindu-Muslim communal violence occurred during the reporting period.

Communal violence sparked by a traffic accident occurred in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, in October 2004. Police attempting to quell the violence were pelted with stones and responded with gunshots, killing one person and injuring three. There were no updates available during the reporting period.

In March 2006, the state of Goa reported the first significant instance of Hindu-Muslim violence since its inception in 1960. A group of Hindus attacked and destroyed Muslim shops and vehicles in two towns in central Goa under the pretext of protesting against the illegal construction of a mosque by recent Muslim immigrants. The small Goa police force summoned 300 riot police officers from neighboring Karnataka to contain the violence.

According to media reports, in 2006, the chief minister of Bihar ordered a probe into the 1989 Bhagalpur riots that killed more than 1,000 persons, mostly Muslims. Some of the responsible were convicted, but most of the guilty remained at large.

On October 23, 2005, a case of sexual harassment at a clothing shop led to Hindu-Muslim clashes in Agra. Police quelled the violence with no loss of life.

In Kerala, RSS activists attacked a mosque at Vallikunnam in Alleppey district on February 23, 2005, killing one Muslim man and injuring two others, including the imam.

The Indian Express reported on June 1, 2006, that the Kerala Government submitted to the high court that there was nothing unconstitutional in Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) taking an oath in the name of Allah. This was done in response to a writ petition filed by a BJP youth leader challenging the constitutional validity of eleven newly elected Muslim MLAs in Kerala who were sworn in the name of Allah and not in the name of God, or by making a solemn affirmation, as prescribed.

In July 2004, Hindus in Vadodara, Gujarat launched a two-month economic boycott against Muslims following the killing in June of a Hindu by his former business partner, a Muslim. The alleged killer's family relocated from the village.

On July 4, 2004, approximately 300 Bajrang Dal activists attacked a Muslim-owned hospital in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, destroying property and causing patients to flee. The activists were protesting the elopement of a Hindu girl with a Muslim worker from the hospital canteen. The police registered a complaint, but at the end of the reporting period, there had been no arrests.

In July 2004, in Gujarat, rioters killed two persons, injured twenty, destroyed forty houses and fifteen shops, and looted property worth thousands of dollars after an alleged incident of sexual harassment of a Hindu girl by Muslim youth. In September 2004, also in Gujarat, minor Hindu-Muslim clashes during a Hindu religious procession resulted in property damage but no injuries or deaths.

On August 27, 2004, unknown assailants threw crude bombs outside two mosques in Poorna and Jalna, Central Maharashtra, just after Friday prayers, injuring eighteen worshippers. A week later, minor riots following the blasts led to property damage but no loss of life.

The press reported on October 27, 2004, that the S.J. Dave High School, in Gujarat, had for the past six years required its students to wear patches associating

them with their religion. The school agreed to stop the practice after two school trustees objected to it and the district education officer asked the school to stop. Opponents of the patch requirement expressed concern that it would enable continued discrimination against Muslims in educational institutions.

Sectarian violence in October 2004 also claimed the lives of two Muslims clerics in Orai, Uttar Pradesh. Police reported the violence was sparked by a conflict over control of a religious site.

Three persons were killed and fifteen others injured in February 2005 in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, when sectarian violence between two Muslim groups erupted over a disputed procession. The trouble started when members of one Muslim sect attempted to prevent a procession by the other from going through their area.

In August 2004, there were press reports that the Buddhist community was deeply concerned over rising incidents of harassment and persecution of Buddhist tribespeople by militants and security forces alike, particularly in the northeast. Reportedly, two separatist groups—the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K)—demanded land belonging to Buddhists and local indigenous faiths in villages in Tirap and Changlang district. Members of both the NSCN-IM and the NSCN-K were predominantly Christian. The press also reported that both groups were pressing Buddhists to convert to Christianity. No further related incidents were reported during the year.

In May 2005, Akhil Kumar Sahoo, General Secretary of the Orissa Buddhist Front, claimed that the state government had taken no administrative or legal steps towards recognition of the Buddhist community. Although the NCM had directed the state government to declare the birthdays of Lord Buddha and Sikhism's founder Guru Nanak as state holidays, only Guru Nanak's birthday had been recognized.

Leaders of the Tibetan Buddhist community in the southern part of the country commented during the year that relations with the Government and local residents were good and that they did not believed to be persecuted. In May 2005, a leading Buddhist monk stated that tensions between Tibetans and their largely Hindu neighbors occurred because of economic rather than religious reasons.

In a rare case of Muslim-Buddhist communal tension, members of the two communities clashed in Leh, Jammu and Kashmir in February 2006, over the alleged desecration of a Qur'an. Four houses were set on fire and an unspecified number of persons were injured. The Government deployed police and military personnel and implemented a curfew in the area. Buddhist leaders denied the desecration, which they characterized as a rumor spread by outsiders intent on disrupting centuries of communal harmony between Leh's Buddhists and Shi'as.

Radical ethnic and religious groups carried out attacks on the media during the previous reporting period. In June 2005, radical Shiv Sena elements attacked the Mumbai office of the newspaper Aapla Mahanagar, assaulted the editorial staff, and damaged office equipment in response to an article written against a Hindu religious sect. In August 2005, in Mumbai, alleged Muslim fundamentalist activists attacked the editor of a Hindi language newspaper, Sajid Rashid, with knives and seriously injured him, charging that he had insulted Islam. Mumbai police filed charges in the case, but the assailants remained at large and the investigation open at the end of the reporting period.

In Christian-majority areas, there were occasional reports that Christians persecuted members of other faiths belonging to regional minorities. In Tripura, there were several reported cases of harassment of non-Christians by members of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), a militant separatist group with a largely evangelical Christian membership.

According to a media report, International VHP Secretary Pravin Togadia claimed that the VHP planned to reconvert all Christians residing in BJP ruled states to Hinduism by 2005 and "expose the global Christian conspiracy of conversions."

The VHP reported in February 2005 that it considered 2004 a successful year for reconversions, in that it brought 12,857 persons back "into the fold" of Hinduism, 3,727 from Islam and 9,130 from Christianity.

In April 2006, Former BJP President L.K. Advani spoke out against religious conversions. He stated, "We strongly condemn the campaign of proselytization which poses a grave threat to Hindu society. We demand stern action against those who indulge in such activities." Advani highlighted what he described as an "organized foreign-funded conversion campaign by evangelical groups," noting that "it is bad enough that religious conversions are conducted in a systematic manner through inducements and coercions, but such activities are more ominous when they are facilitated by foreign funded organizations, ostensibly under the garb of social service for poor and under-privileged families."

Christians often held large public prayer meetings without violence or protests. For example, on May 13, 2005, a leading Christian evangelist spoke in New Delhi, and the event, attended by more than 3,000 persons, was peaceful, with a moderate police presence and no Hindu activist group protests.

In January 2005, the Government permitted the U.S.-based evangelical leader Benny Hinn to hold a rally in Bangalore, which was attended by thousands. The Government stipulated that the event must not disturb the peace and that no one should perform "divine healing." One online news service reported that, although Hinn carried out "divine healing," the Government took no action. A few Hindu groups protested the event, resulting in minor damage to property and vehicles in the area.

Another U.S.-based Christian evangelist, Pat Robertson, spoke at a prayer meeting in Delhi on May 13, 2005, attended by dignitaries such as Congress leader Subodh Kant Sahay. The event attracted approximately 3,000 persons and, with a moderate police presence, concluded peacefully. There was no agitation during the meeting. Visiting Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish leaders also regularly addressed their adherents without incident.

The All-India Catholic Union (AICU) expressed deep concern over growing anti-Christian violence in several BJP-controlled states following the defeat of the BJP in the national elections in May 2004. The AICU claimed that the perpetrators were members of fundamentalist groups affiliated with the RSS.

In November, the AICU reported that there were approximately 200 attacks against Christians throughout the country in the first eleven months of 2005.

In January 2005, in Assam, a mob set fire to a newly opened Catholic school, after accusing school staff of attempting to convert Hindus. Police brought the situation under control, but could not save the school building from destruction.

On May 21, 2005, the body of K. Daniel, a preacher from Kummarvadi, was found in Andhra Pradesh bearing marks suggestive of an acid attack. On June 2, 2005, police in Andhra Pradesh found the body of Pastor Isaac Raju, who had been missing since May 24. Press reported that in both cases a person called and gave precise directions on the location of the body. Church members claim the killings were planned to terrorize the Christian community. In response, the state government formed a Special Investigation Team to find those responsible for the killings and the Home Minister also offered protection to Christian missionaries living in the state. In June 2005, police arrested Kokala Govardhan for the killings. Govardhan admitted that he killed the two pastors for converting Hindus to Christianity. The Government of Andhra Pradesh disbursed $6,818 (300 thousand INR) to the families of those killed as financial assistance in September 2005.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 3, 2005, a group of approximately twenty RSS members in Andhra Pradesh forcibly took Pastor Yesupadam to the local police station, where they threatened to kill him if he continued his Christian activities. The pastor reportedly received a number of telephone threats after the incident.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 12, 2006, approximately 100 persons beat pastors M. Aaron and Madhu Kumar, of the Indian Pentecostal Church, when they attempted to distribute Christian pamphlets during a convention of Bible students in Nizamabad Polytechnic School in Andhra Pradesh. Police registered a case against ten assailants, and attributed responsibility for the attack to the student wing of the BJP and RSS.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 13, 2006, in Nizambad, Andhra Pradesh, ten members of the RSS pulled Christians from their home and beat them, leaving the pastor, Nagani Swami David, unconscious and four others injured. Police arrested and charged nine men in connection with the attack. The attackers told police that Pastor David and the other Christians had torn down pictures of Hindu gods.

Religious press outlets reported that on February 28, 2006, fifteen assailants attacked Pastor Lavete Jacob and other Christians, including Jacob's wife, daughters, and a family friend in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. Five men were arrested and released on bail. The same group had earlier attacked Jacob on February 18, 2006.

According to Christian media reports, on March 20, 2006, approximately thirty persons attacked a group of Christians who were preaching in the Pappula bazaar of Nellore, Andra Pradesh, resulting in the short-term hospitalization of three pastors. Local Christians claimed the group attacked them because they had converted a former RSS member to Christianity. The United Pastors' Association of Nellore and the AICC held a protest rally on March 20, 2006, and submitted a memorandum to local authorities, demanding the arrest of the attackers. A number of men were arrested and released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 8, 2006, in Rampur Thanda, Andhra Pradesh, Pastor Prem Kumar of the Church of South India was killed after being approached by a young man requesting him to lead a prayer service in the village. Police initially denied any religious motive to the killing. The case remained under investigation.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 10, 2006, in Nizamabad, Andhra Pradesh, a group of Christian workers from the organization Gospel for Asia were beaten and their equipment destroyed while showing a film on social problems such as HIV/AIDS. The Christians were not proselytizing at the time of attack, although they had earlier been involved in evangelism in the area.

Religious press outlets reported that on August 31, 2005, Hindu extremists surrounded property belonging to a Christian Gospel Society in Bihar and demanded the arrest of its director for allegedly desecrating a Hindu religious statue. On September 3, 2005, the police arrested the director, holding him for several hours, and on September 25, 2005, the attackers returned to the property and injured several Christians found there.

Religious press outlets reported that Hindu activists in Chhattisgarh converted hundreds of Christians in a ceremony in April 2005. A local newspaper reported that senior BJP leader Dilip Singh Judeo threatened Christian workers during his address at the ceremony, stating, "If Christian missionaries don't stop converting people, we will take up arms."

Religious press outlets reported that on August 14, 2005, the Dharma Sena (Army of Religion) extremist group attacked a Christian church under construction in Raipur, Chattisgarh. The group alleged that the church building encroached on land belonging to a Sena leader. The church denied this claim.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 11, 2005, the Hindu extremist group Dharma Sena attacked two churches in Raipur, Chattisgarh, tearing a cross from one building and throwing it into a septic tank and inflicting approximately $1,140 (50 thousand INR) worth of damage. Members of the Dharma Sena also attacked a church meeting, physically assaulting the wife and brother of a pastor, and accusing the church of conversions.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 4, 2005, a group of approximately thirty Dharma Sena members attacked five Christians in a church in Raipur, Chattisgarh, allegedly forcing them to bow before a statue at a Hindu temple. No details were known about further developments.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 25, 2006, in Bothli, Chhattisgarh, a group of approximately thirty alleged members of Dharam Jagran Sena raided a prayer meeting organized by six Christian families, beating those present. Among the main victims was an eight-month pregnant woman, who was taken to the hospital with internal injuries. Reportedly, the hospital declined to treat her and police also refused to take action against the perpetrators.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 14, 2005, a group of Hindu extremists attacked a large Pentecostal prayer meeting in Dayal Pur, Delhi, injuring five pastors and damaging church property. A local BJP MLA and his supporters purportedly prevented church members from registering a case against the attackers.

Religious press outlets reported that in October 2004, approximately thirty individuals attacked a Christian pastor and his wife as they were returning home from a prayer gathering in south Gujarat. The police filed a FIR but made no arrests.

In November 2005, Christian press reported that a group of approximately 150 high-caste Hindus attacked dalit Christians in the Kheda district of Gujarat, injuring five and allegedly sexually assaulting dalit and Christian women in the village. The report indicated that the former president of the local Congress party led the attack and that police initially refused to file a case. An investigation was ongoing.

From February 11 to 13, 2006, the VHP organized a gathering of more than 200 thousand Hindus from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan in the town of Subir (often referred to as "the Dangs") in Gujarat. Activists argued that the Hindu festival constituted indirect pressure for tribal Christians in the district to reconvert to Hinduism. Despite widespread anticipation that the gathering would generate immense pressure to reconvert, no such conversions were reported. However, Gujarat Chief Minister and BJP leader Narendra Modi and other speakers condemned conversion activity by Christian missionaries and exhorted tribal Christians to "return home" to Hinduism. Modi told the gathering that it was his "constitutional duty" to prevent conversions by Hindus to Christianity and RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan stated that Christians and Muslims should be "Indianized," since they "could not be thrown into the sea." The Government sent a sizable police contingent, which observers and human rights groups stated helped prevent violence and intimidation.

In April 2006, the Gujarat Government refused to renew a contract with an order of Christian nuns to work in a government leprosy hospital. The press reported that the government suspended the contract because it believed the nuns were performing religious services and conversions. The nuns and patients at the hospital denied the charges.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 21, 2006, in Dubalia, Jharkhand, a newly-converted Christian, Santosh Karmali, was forced to forfeit his right to the land of his family. Allegedly, tribal animist believers forced him to sign a document during a meeting of the village council and the Central Sarna (collective name for the tribal animist religions in Jharkhand) Committee. Karmali had belonged to a Sarna religion prior to his conversion. His wife's head was shaved, lime powder was applied to her face, and she was paraded around the village. The family was then forced out the village, and the Sarna samiti committee took possession of the family land.

The media reported the death of a twenty-five-year-old Christian pastor in Channapatana, Karnataka on February 11, 2005. Although an official autopsy determined it was a suicide, Christian groups alleged that Hindu extremists had killed him.

In May 2005, activists of the Bajrang Dal vandalized a Christian church in Channapatna, Karnataka, injuring women and children belonging to the congregation. The state police arrested six activists and registered a case against them.

On August 30, 2005, approximately fifty assailants ransacked a Christian church building in Bangalore. No further details were known.

Hindu extremists in southern Karnataka attacked a Christian church on Easter Sunday 2006 and assaulted the pastor. District police authorities arrested four persons who allegedly belonged to the Bajrang Dal.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 16, 2006, in Bataguri, Karnataka alleged Bajrang Dal members attacked two separate churches. A group of ten to fifteen men attacked the Believers' Church during Easter Sunday service and vandalized the pastor's house, beating the pastor and his wife and threatening the parishioners with further attacks should they continue meeting. On the same day, twenty five to thirty men raided another church, threatening women and children and destroying church property.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 8, 2006, in Thovaracare, Karnataka, seven members of the Bajrang Dal broke up a Christian prayer meeting, chased away two pastors, and threatened other Christians present.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 9, 2006, in Kolar Gold Field, Karnataka, extremists destroyed a church after the pastor ignored orders to cease his work and leave the area.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 11, 2006, in Namthi, Kanataka, 150 persons seized Pastor Sundar Rao after he led a prayer meeting and forcibly took him to the police station, where they and the police severely beat Rao. The next day, after his release, he was assaulted again. The attackers were arrested and released on bail.

In August 2004, a Catholic priest was killed in Kerala, during the state's annual harvest festival. Church members reported that the Catholic priest had received intimidating telephone calls threatening him with death if he did not cease to "proselytize." The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) claimed the killing was meant to destroy inter-religious harmony in Kerala and demanded an investigation.

In September 2004, also in Kerala, BJP activists attacked nuns and monks belonging to the order "Missionaries of Charity," injuring one monk and one nun and damaging a vehicle. The police arrested fourteen RSS–BJP sympathizers in connection with the attack.

In April 2005, Hindu and Muslim villagers burned down a prayer hall and physically attacked three Christian church members following a baptism ceremony in Kerala. Two days later, villagers assaulted the pastor and his assistant.

On Easter eve 2005, in Chalakud Taluna, Kerala, approximately twenty RSS activists attacked Christians viewing the film The Passion of the Christ, injuring one man.

There were no further developments in two incidents of anti-Christian violence in the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh that took place in January and March 2004. In the incidents, assailants attacked local Christians, damaging property and beating a priest following the rape and death of two Hindu minor girls. One Hindu activist was killed during the violence, allegedly by a shot fired from a church. The police charged several persons, but the cases had not come up for hearing.

Religious press outlets reported that on August 21, 2005, Hindu extremists attacked a Christian prayer meeting in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, injuring at least ten persons, including several women and a two-year-old child. The attack targeted two

Christians awaiting trial on charges of forcible conversion of Hindus. Police registered a case against three men for the attack. The progress of the case was unknown.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 4, 2005, police ordered two Christians out of a church service while a large group of Hindus gathered outside. A Hindu leader allegedly then threatened to burn the two men alive if they attended another service. Subsequently, police warned the men not to attend church services.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 22, 2005, assailants attacked a Hindu man and several Christians in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, alleging that they had damaged a Hindu statue. One Christian was injured in the attack and another detained at the local police station for approximately thirty-two hours.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 5, 2005, Hindu extremists barred access to a new church built in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, assaulting the pastor and other members of the congregation. The attackers claimed the district collector had ordered the church closed.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 4, 2005, RSS activists assaulted a Christian pastor during a worship service in his home after complaining about the noise emanating from the building. Police, called by the attackers, also reportedly beat the pastor and detained him for two hours.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 25, 2006, a group of seven local police in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, entered a Christian home, reportedly arresting and beating two tribal pastors and ordering them to end "Christian activities" or face the consequences. The following day, police released the pastors, who were subsequently denied treatment by a local hospital. No action was taken against the police involved.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 28, 2006, at least six Christians were injured during an attack on a prayer meeting in a private home in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Approximately thirty persons threw stones at the building and shouted anti-Christian slogans, accused the organizers of carrying out "forced conversions," and beat the participants. The church members blamed the Hindu militant group, Bajrang Dal, for the attack.

Religious press outlets reported that on February 5, 2006, RSS members beat two Christian men for distributing Christian literature in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, reportedly injuring one. Police registered a case and were investigating the matter, but no arrests had been made by the end of the period covered by this report.

During May and June 2006, various extremist groups in Madhya Pradesh allegedly led several attacks against Christians. Father Anand Muttungal, spokesperson of Madhya Pradesh Catholic diocese, and Dr. John Dayal of the AICC charged that the district administration and the police colluded in this harassment of Christians. Police refused to intervene, even when they personally witnessed the attacks.

According to data provided by a Christian NGO, over the period of August 2005 to June 2006, more than twenty Christian activists (pastors and social workers) were taken to police stations, booked under MPFRA, and released on personal sureties of approximately $100 (4,647 INR).

On May 28, 2006, two recent Christian converts residing in Nadia village, Madhya Pradesh, claimed that their wives were gang-raped by local Hindu villagers when they refused to reconvert to Hinduism. Indira Iyengar, the sole Christian member of the Madhya Pradesh State Minorities Commission, arranged for the couples to meet the media on June 5, 2006, in the state capital of Bhopal. After the couples had given the statements, a Bajrang Dal activist disrupted the press conference and accused Iyengar of making false rape charges. At the end of the reporting period, the two couples were in hiding. The Khargone police registered the couples' complaint of rape against four prominent villagers and sent the DNA of the accused to Calcutta for examination. According to police officials, the medical exam was inconclusive. Hindu villagers have filed counter-complaints, accusing the couples of trying to convert Hindus to Christianity. The police have not charged the couples nor arrested them.

On May 31, 2006, sixteen Christians accused in the Arjun Pal murder case were acquitted by a Madhya Pradesh district court of all charges, including murder, riot, attempt to murder, and unlawful assembly. Two had been released on bail, while fourteen had spent more than two years in jail. The case began in January 2004, when the raped body of a nine-year-old Hindu girl was found inside the premises of a Catholic school in Ali Rajpur in Madhya Pradesh. Enraged Hindus then ransacked school property and attacked three churches in neighboring villages. One Hindu, Arjun Pal, was shot and killed during subsequent Hindu-Christian rioting. The case had been in the courts since 2005.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 6, 2006, in Thaiyavali Chowk, Madhya Pradesh, extremists attacked the Christ Church Boys' School, physically assaulting a teacher and threatening the headmaster. Reportedly, extremists were angry at the school's decision to not close during a Hindu festival. The school did not register a complaint with the police.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 4, 2006, in Myapuri, Madhya Pradesh, approximately fifty alleged Bajrang Dal members disrupted a prayer meeting and took all present to a nearby Hindu temple, threatening the women with rape if they should continue attending Christian activities. Subsequently, police arrested fifteen, all Christians. The pastor was released on bail while the others were interrogated and released after four hours.

In January 2005, in Ambarnath, Maharashtra, a Hindu group attacked a small convent of the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites and broke a wooden cross. The nuns locked themselves in the convent and were not harmed. The group left pamphlets ordering the nuns to leave the area. Police were investigating the attack but had made no arrests by the end of the reporting period.

Press reported that in February 2005, a Hindu priest in the Catholic village of Rajura, Maharashtra, insisted that tribal Christians turn their church into a Hindu temple or face violent consequences. A witness stated that the cleric urged Hindu villagers to kill the Christians with swords.

Numerous religious press outlets reported that in May 2005, Hindu extremists physically attacked eleven Christian families from Jamanya village, Maharashtra. The reports alleged that village officials summoned the families to a panchayat (community council of elders), which demanded that they renounce their faith. When they refused, the men were beaten with heavy sticks and chased from the village. On the following day, the mob attacked the women and children. Witnesses stated the mob also tried to disrobe the women. No arrests had been made by the end of the period covered by this report.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 26, 2005, assailants attacked three Christians in Maharashtra for distributing Christian literature. The attackers filed a report accusing the three men of engaging in unethical conversion activities. The police took the victims to a local hospital and later filed charges against the attackers.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 29, 2006, Hindu extremists attacked the inauguration ceremony of a Catholic school and hostel in Ghosale, Maharashtra. The attackers accused the staff of trying to convert persons by offering free education to their children. The police arrested eighteen persons; all were released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on February 26, 2006, approximately fifty Bajrang Dal activists attacked and injured three Christian pastors in Nere, Maharashtra. Police arrested the attackers, who were released on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on April 11, 2006, in Khopate, Maharashtra, approximately fifty members of the VHP assaulted two pastors during a raid on a large-scale prayer meeting at the Living Light Fellowship Church, accusing them of converting persons to Christianity. Reportedly, five other pastors present were taken to a nearby Hindu temple where they were beaten after refusing to worship a Hindu god. Police conducted an investigation at the behest of the police commissioner and subsequently made a number of arrests. All were released on minor charges.

Religious press outlets reported that on May 22, 2006, in Chopada, Maharashtra, alleged Hindu extremists stoned a member of the Indian Evangelical Team (IET).

Religious press outlets reported that on May 1, 2006, in Seikmaijing, Manipur, Hindu villagers burned down a church after a prominent village member converted to Christianity. Some village Christians were also physically assaulted and told to depart the village.

In February 2004, Hindu villagers in Jagatsingpur, Orissa, seized eight persons, including a local pastor and eight Christian women, and shaved their heads. Villagers accused the pastor of forcibly converting two village women; however, the women denied this. In May 2004, the local police arrested six persons in connection with the incident, and the pastor and the eight women remained in protected housing. No new information was available during the reporting period concerning these cases.

In August 2004, at least 300 persons broke into a Catholic church in Raikia, Orissa, and smashed religious statues, doors, and windows. The incident occurred after some Christians protested the removal by Hindus of fencing encircling the church. The local police brought the situation under control, but took no action against the perpetrators.

On September 15, 2004, in Orissa, a nun was seriously burned when an unidentified man threw acid on her.

In October 2004, in Baripada, Orissa, a local court ordered the arrest of five Christian preachers for "inciting communal feelings." After disrupting a Hindu ceremony, they were arrested for "uttering words with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of others and issuing threats of criminal intimidation to several persons."

In October 2004, approximately 300 tribal Christians were "reconverted" to Hinduism in a mass ceremony organized by the World Hindu Council in Orissa. Gauri Prasad Rath, state secretary of the council, stated it was the largest reconversion ceremony they had ever held. Christian leaders expressed shock and dismay at the news and argued that Hindu groups were able to force Christians to convert because they depend on the Hindu majority for employment.

On February 16, 2005, in Orissa, Baptist pastor Gilbert Raj was tortured and killed. Ten days later, Pentecostal pastor Dilip Dalai was stabbed to death. Christian groups claimed they were killed to stop their missionary work.

On February 27, 2005, a group of persons attacked Christian evangelist Kiran Kumar while he was returning home after holding a prayer meeting in Orissa. The police took him into custody, alleging he was attempting to forcibly convert persons. He was later released.

In February 2005, Hindu nationalists accused Christian missionaries of raping and killing a fourteen-year-old girl in the town of Dhenkanal, Orissa. The victim's mother claimed the missionaries had threatened her family if they did not convert to Christianity. The police rejected the conversion theory and were investigating the crime.

Christian press reported that in April 2005, the RSS converted approximately 300 Christians to Hinduism in the Chakapad village of Orissa without receiving permission under the state's anti-conversion law. Noting that police were present and did nothing, Christian groups argued that the Orissa anti-conversion law is discriminatory and only enforced when a person converted from Hinduism to another religion.

On June 14, 2005, Sangh Parivar activists disrupted the Indian People's Tribunal on Environmental and Human Rights hearing on the communal situation in Orissa. The activists harassed female tribunal members and threatened to rape them and parade them through the streets.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 20, 2005, fifteen houses belonging to members of the Christian community in Gajapati, Orissa, were burnt down, leaving six persons seriously injured and hospitalized, and a large number homeless. The attacks were estimated to have caused approximately $21,730 (one million INR) worth of damage. The attacks occurred at a time when the Christian population of the village was attending church. Eight Christians and three or four Hindu extremists were arrested by police following the attacks. No further details were available about the progress of the case during the period covered by this report.

According to a church leader, on January 16, 2006, alleged Hindu extremists set fire to three houses belonging to Christians in Jajpur, Orissa. The inhabitants fled and took shelter in the local police station.

Religious press outlets reported that on January 24, 2006, in Koikonda, Orissa, Hindu villagers injured ten Christians (including four visiting Christian missionaries) during an attack on a Christian home where the participants had meet the night before. The village pastor and one of the missionaries tried to lodge an official complaint shortly thereafter, but police refused to file a case. Police arrested two men in connection with the incident, and subsequently released them on bail.

Religious press outlets reported that on March 20, 2006, arsonists targeted a church in Nandapur, Orissa. Local Christians claimed that extremists were responsible for the attack. The church leader was pursuing legal redress during the period covered by this report.

Press reported that approximately 342 Christian converts were reconverted to Hinduism in Orissa's Phulbani district during a religious conference conducted by the RSS in April 2006. RSS leader K.S. Sudarshan and VHP President Ashok Singhal attended the conference, and asked Sangh Parivar activists to monitor missionary activities, and demanded the Government stop cow slaughter and conversions.

The press reported in April 2005 that VHP activists in Chandigarh, Punjab planned to start an awareness campaign concerning the conversions of Sikhs to Christianity and urge Hindus to protest "vehemently" against the practice.

Religious press outlets reported that on June 1, 2006, in Pangila, Punjab, Pastor Harbans Lal, leader of Happy Life Prosperity Church in Panglia village, was beaten unconscious by approximately fifteen to twenty persons.

In June 2005, the Jodhpur District Administration in Rajasthan rescinded permission for the Pentecostal Church of God to hold a gathering in the city after VHP and Bajrang Dal protests. Hindu activists claimed the church was converting Hindu children, prompting the Government to cancel the gathering to prevent violence. A Congress Party official claimed the administration caved to communal pressures from Hindu activists and had no right to withdraw permission for the event.

Religious press outlets reported that on August 14, 2005, Hindu extremists attacked a prayer meeting held in a private home in Banswara, Rajasthan, injuring the owner of the house and others. Reportedly, the following day, Hindu activists prevented the prayer meeting sponsors from filing charges at the local police station.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 16, 2005, Hindu extremist youths assaulted five nuns as they boarded a bus to attend a Catholic event in Udaipur, Rajasthan. No details were known about the investigation of this incident, but Christian press reported that that attack was religiously motivated.

Religious press outlets reported that on October 27, 2005, the Tribal Christian Welfare Society curtailed its three-day festival in the Banswara district, Rajasthan, after violent RSS opposition to the event. Reportedly, a large number of Christians were assaulted in the area, and the RSS attempted to block would-be participants from reaching the festival.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 23, 2005, three men assaulted two nuns as they waited at a bus stop in Rajasthan. One of the attackers had reportedly been arrested and released on bail in connection with other attacks on Christians. No details were known about the investigation of this incident.

Religious press outlets reported that on December 24, 2005, nine RSS members attacked four Catholics, including one priest, traveling to attend mass in Jambuda, Rajasthan. The four were reportedly beaten until they were unconscious.

Between January and June 2006, a number of institutions and staff of EMI, which operates various charitable foundations in Rajasthan and across the country, endured considerable harassment from extremists and the state government.

On January 25, 2006, the organization was warned to not hold the Emmanuel Seminary annual graduation ceremony, which had been the target of an attack in 2005. Following threats and harassment as well as official police notification that no security would be provided for the event, EMI leaders decided to cancel the ceremony.

On February 10, 2006, an EMI school and orphanage in Ramganjmandi, Rajasthan, were set on fire. Reportedly, local police had warned EMI leaders that they would not move to prevent the violence.

On February 14, 2006, Hindu extremists attacked EMI headquarters in Kota after a copy of the controversial book, "Haqeeqat" (The Truth) was discovered on the premises. The book, which has been banned, reportedly contains derogatory references to Hinduism. Numerous sources indicated that EMI was actively distributing the text.

Attacks on other EMI institutions also took place through February. On February 22, 2006, an EMI primary school in Sanganer was attacked, and on February 24, 2006, the Jhowara Emmanuel Secondary School and church building were vandalized.

At the end of February, the Rajasthan Government had revoked the licenses of an EMI Bible institute, orphanage, school, hospital and church. On March 3, 2006, the Department of Social Welfare of Rajasthan froze the organization's bank accounts. However, on June 27, 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 on June 28, 2006.

Religious press outlets reported that in July 2005, Hindu villagers in Tamil Nadu closed down a Pentecostal church and expelled the pastor and his wife, allegedly in response to decreasing interest in Hindu festivals in the village. After the couple filed a complaint, the police began negotiating with the villagers. No further details were known.

Religious press outlets reported that on September 4, 2005, fifteen extremists disrupted a Christian worship service at Allahabad Agricultural Institute destroying, religious items and injuring several persons. No further details were known.

Religious press outlets reported that on November 6, 2005, Hindu extremists disrupted a prayer gathering of approximately 200 Christians at the home of a family in Uttar Pradesh. The extremists accused the host family of converting Hindus to Christianity.

The press reported that on April 17, 2005, in West Bengal, members of forty-five tribal families reconverted to Hinduism from Christianity in a ceremony reportedly conducted by the VHP. The local administration investigated and determined that

there was no indication that the conversions were forced. Some of the reconverted were reportedly from neighboring states such as Jharkhand and Orissa. A Christian organization leader asserted that there was no proof that the reconverted were actual Christians. No new information was available regarding this case.

On December 5, 2005, the press reported that a mob ransacked a church in West Bengal and burned a Bible after priests objected to activities of a local criminal gang. The attackers destroyed furniture, stole items of value and burnt the church Bible. Police arrested two attackers. No one was injured in the attack.

Press reported that on January 16, 2006, ten were injured after the demolition of the Christ Mission Ashram church in south Calcutta, West Bengal, resulted in a clash between church members and Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority workers.

In April 2005, NDTV reported the conversion of Hindu migrant laborers from Bihar to Sikhism in Punjab. The state has more than one million migrant laborers, largely from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, employed in agriculture and industry. Experts observed that the migrants, who are either low-caste or dalit Hindus, convert to escape widespread discrimination, and that, although they become a more accepted part of Sikh society, they remained at the lowest end of the Sikh social and caste "hierarchy."

According to the Home Ministry, from 2002 to 2003, approximately 56,246 Pandit families were driven from their homes in Jammu and Kashmir by anti-Hindu violence perpetrated by Muslim insurgents and terrorists. Of these refugees, 4,778 families still were living in 12 refugee camps in Jammu at the end of the period covered by this report, and 238 families were still in Delhi's 14 camps, with the remainder living elsewhere.

The Pandit community criticized the bleak physical, educational, and economic conditions in the camps and feared that a negotiated solution giving greater autonomy to the state's Muslim majority might prevent their return and threaten the continued survival of the Pandit community in Jammu and Kashmir.

Following the Kashmir earthquake of 2005, terrorists slaughtered nine members of two Hindu families in Bedhal tehsil in the border district of Rajouri on October 10, 2005. The terrorists, thought to be members of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, raided a Hindu home and slit the throats of the male family members one by one, killing two children in front of their father before killing him. Soon after, the same militants killed four members of another Hindu family in a different village. Security forces launched a search for the militants.

The slaughter of cows, considered holy by Hindus, sometimes led to violence. Several state governments (including Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat) have passed laws prohibiting slaughter of bovine species. Hindu nationalists often forcibly implemented these laws themselves.

On July 10, 2004, a Muslim farmer tried to sell a bull at the Barghat weekly market, located approximately 20 kilometers from the town of Seoni in Madhya Pradesh. Several Shiv Sena and Bajrang Dal activists accosted him, accusing him of trying to sell his bull to a butcher and beat him to death. The district police arrested the attackers.

In March 2005, in Kota, Rajashtan, activists from the Bajrang Dal clashed with a Muslim over the possession of a cow, leaving two persons injured. One member of the Bajrang Dal was beaten up when he attempted to stop the slaughter of a cow in Kota. In retaliation, a group from the Bajrang Dal clashed with the Muslims, injuring one.

On November 5, 2005, one person was killed and thirteen injured during communal clashes resulting from the slaughter of a cow in three villages in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Reportedly, Hindus caught two men selling beef on November 1 (the night of the Hindu festival Diwali) and, when no charges were filed against the vendors, attacked Muslim property and burned approximately twenty-four houses. The police station commander was suspended for dereliction of duty and the police later arrested twelve persons in connection with the violence.

Some upper-caste Hindus, fearing that conversions by Hindu tribespeople and dalits to Christianity might weaken and ultimately destroy the rigid caste hierarchy, committed acts of violence against Christians.

In 2001, Human Rights Watch reported that the practice of dedicating or marrying young, prepubescent girls to a Hindu deity or temple as "servants of god," or "Devadasis," reportedly continued in several southern states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Devadasis, who generally are dalits, may not marry. They must live apart from their families and are required to provide sexual services to priests and high caste Hindus. Reportedly, many eventually are sold to urban brothels. The Devadasi tradition is linked, to some degree, to both trafficking and the spread of HIV/AIDS. In 1992, the state of Karnataka passed the Karnataka

Devadasi Prohibition of Dedication Act (KDPDA) and called for the rehabilitation of Devadasis, but this law reportedly was not enforced effectively and criminalized the actions of Devadasis. Since Devadasis are by custom required to be sexually available to higher caste men, it reportedly is difficult for them to obtain justice from the legal system if they are raped. The KDPDA does not have a provision for penalizing offenders; however the Department of Women and Child Development formed a team to review the act to provide for such a provision.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy continued to promote religious freedom through contact with the country's senior leadership, as well as with state and local officials. The embassy and consulates regularly met with religious leaders and report on events and trends that affect religious freedom.

The U.S. Government supported a wide range of initiatives to encourage religious and communal tolerance and freedom. Members of the embassy community celebrated Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jewish festivals throughout the year with members of the various religious communities.

The embassy repeatedly expressed concern over Rajasthan's anti-conversion legislation with high ranking officials of the state and national governments, including the NHRC. The mission also expressed concern over Jharkand Chief Minister Arjun Munda's December 2005 announcement that he would propose legislation against forcible religious conversions. No legislation had been enacted in Jharkhand by the end of the period covered by this report.

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, including the bombings at the Jama Masjid in Old Delhi.

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 period covered by this report, embassy and consulate officials met with important leaders of all significant minority communities. Officers regularly met with representatives of the country's diverse Muslim community and continued an active program of outreach to explain U.S. policies around the world and to better understand Indian Muslim attitudes towards the United States. 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 India, and Education and Women in Islam. In December, the Calcutta Consulate also hosted a seminar on the role of religious leaders in combating HIV/AIDS in their communities.

In March 2005, the U.S. Department of State revoked the visa of a senior level state government official under section 212(a)(2)(G) of the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, which makes ineligible any foreign government official who "was responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom."

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 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 the Mumbai, Chennai, and Calcutta Consulates reached out to madrassahs through the special International Visitor Madrassah programs.

The Consulate in Chennai also organized roundtables in June 2003, October 2004, and November 2005 to promote better understanding between the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist communities. The Chennai Consulate continued to reach out to the Muslim community. The consulate continued to provide English instruction to underprivileged Muslim children, to donate books to madrassahs in Kerala,

Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, and to sponsor qualified Muslims for IV programs on "Islamic Life in the U.S." and "Religious Education in the U.S."

U.S. officials, including the ambassador, continued to engage state officials on the reversal of anti-conversion laws. Embassy officers also raised the specific case of Rajasthan's new law at senior levels of the state and national governments and with the NHRC.

KAZAKHSTAN

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the various religious communities worship largely without government interference. Although local officials attempt on occasion to limit the practice of religion by some nontraditional groups, higher-level officials, or courts usually intervene to correct such attempts.

The overall status of religious freedom deteriorated somewhat during the period covered by this report. 2005 legislation that limited constitutional protections of religious freedom remained in force. National security amendments enacted on July 8, 2005, imposed mandatory registration requirements on missionaries and religious organizations. Most religious groups, including minority and nontraditional denominations, reported that the legal changes were implemented in a manner that did not materially affect religious activities. Unregistered religious groups reported an increase in court actions against them and an increase in the level of fines imposed for nonregistration.

During the period covered by this report, levels of harassment of religious organizations by local officials remained consistent with the previous reporting period. Reports of local law enforcement officials visiting religious organizations for inspections remained at a level consistent with previous years and most religious organizations reported generally good cooperation from the Government.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The ambassador and other U.S. officials have supported the country's efforts to increase links and mutual understanding among religious groups. U.S. officials engaged in private and public dialogue at all levels to urge that any new legislation be consistent with the country's constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and with the country's tradition of religious tolerance. U.S. embassy and U.S. Department of State 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 Muslim and other religious leaders to meet with a diverse range of counterparts in the United States. U.S. embassy officials maintained an ongoing dialogue with a broad range of groups within the religious community.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,052,540 square miles, and according to January 2006 data from the government statistics agency, its population is 15,219,300.

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 adhering to particular faiths have remained consistent.

Ethnic Kazakhs, who constituted approximately one-half of the population, and ethnic Uzbeks, Uighurs, and Tatars, who collectively comprised less than 10 percent, are historically Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school. Other Islamic groups, which accounted for less than 1 percent of the population, included Shafit Sunni (traditionally associated with Chechens), Shi'a, Sufi, and Ahmadi. The highest concentration of citizens who identified themselves as practicing Muslims was located in the southern region bordering Uzbekistan. A sizeable population of ethnic Russians, and smaller populations of ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Belarusians, were Russian Orthodox by tradition; together they constituted approximately one-third of

the population. An estimated 1.5 percent of the population was ethnic German, many of whom were Roman Catholic or Lutheran.

According to government statistics, Protestant Christian congregations outnumbered Russian Orthodox congregations, although it is unlikely that their number of adherents is higher. The Government reported registering ninety-three "nontraditional" Protestant Christian churches and forty-five affiliated foreign missionaries during the reporting period.

There were 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 were reported to number more than 10,000. The Government reportedly registered 198 Union of Baptists churches during the reporting period, along with 22 affiliated foreign missionaries.

Other Christian associations with a sizable number of congregations included Presbyterians, Lutherans, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Pentecostals. Smaller communities of Methodists, Mennonites, and Mormons were registered. During the reporting period government officials continued to report an increase in registrations of congregations and missionaries affiliated with South Korean Protestant Christian churches.

There was a Roman Catholic archdiocese, whose members accounted for 2 percent of the population, and which includes many ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Germans. The Government reported eighty-three registered Roman Catholic churches and affiliated organizations throughout the country. During the year the Government registered 198 foreign Roman Catholic clergy and missionaries. A smaller, affiliated community of Greek Catholics, many of whom were ethnic Ukrainians, registered three churches, which were served by nine foreign priests and missionaries.

A Jewish community, estimated at well below 1 percent of the population, had synagogues in several larger cities, including Almaty, Astana, and Pavlodar. Rabbis in Almaty reported an increase in attendance for both services and religious education during the reporting period. The Government reported registering eight foreign rabbis and Jewish missionaries.

The Government registered fifty-eight 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 reported four registered Buddhist groups throughout the country.

According to government statistics, there were 413 foreign missionaries in the country as of January 2006. The majority of registered missionaries identified themselves as Christian, with many coming from South Korea, Russia, and other former Soviet countries. While there were only twelve registered foreign Muslim missionaries, more unregistered ones were believed to be active in the southern regions of the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the various 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.

However, the Government enacted national security amendments in July 2005 that narrowed legal protections for religious freedom. The amendments clarified that religious groups are required to register with the Government and in the individual regions (oblasts) in which they have congregations. The amendments give government officials the right to suspend activities of religious groups for administrative reasons. The Government continued to express publicly its support for religious tolerance and diversity.

The national religion law explicitly requires religious organizations to register with the Government; however, it continues to provide that all persons are free to practice their religion "alone or together with others." Prior to 2005 national security amendments to the religion law, religious organizations were required to register if they wished to be accorded legal status in order to buy or rent property, hire employees, or engage in other legal transactions. To register, a religious organization must have at least ten members and submit an application to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). In practice most religious communities choose to register with the Government and are registered with few difficulties.

In December 2005 the Government established the Religious Issues Committee (RIC) within the MOJ. This MOJ committee replaced the Council on Relations with Religious Communities (CRRC), which reported to the prime minister. The RIC 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. Most of the twenty-two RIC employees previously worked with the CRRC.

In 2004 the MOJ designed and implemented a new, one-step registration process, and religious groups noted that registration became more efficient during the reporting period. Article 9 of the religion law requires registration of local religious organizations with the regional office of the MOJ. While religious groups were able to register without difficulty in most cases, some minority religious groups reported that local MOJ officials sometimes denied or delayed registration based on minor administrative concerns. Officials in Western Kazakhstan and Atyrau Oblasts were cited by several groups as being resistant to working with nontraditional groups seeking registration.

The Council of Churches has a policy of not seeking or accepting registration in former Soviet countries. In 1961 the Council of Churches split from the Union of Baptists, which has no objection to registering its congregations. The Union of Baptists reported that all congregations that sought registration during the reporting period successfully obtained it.

The Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center reported that local MOJ authorities have refused, since 2001, repeated applications to register its branch in Atyrau Oblast.

As in previous years, government officials frequently expressed concern regarding the potential spread of political and religious extremism in the south of the country. The Committee for National Security (KNB) has characterized the fight against "religious extremism" as a top priority of the internal intelligence service. An extremism law that came into effect in February 2005 applies to religious and other organizations. Under this law, the Government has broad latitude in identifying and designating a group as an extremist organization, banning a designated group's activities, and criminalizing membership in a banned organization. In March 2005 the Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) political movement was the first organization banned under the extremism law. By the end of the reporting period, no apolitical religious organizations had been outlawed as extremist.

The elections law prohibits political parties based upon ethnic, gender, or religious affiliation.

In 2002 the Constitutional Council ruled that a particular legislative provision violated the constitutional principle separating church and state. This provision required that the Spiritual Association of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), a national organization headed by the chief mufti in Almaty, must approve the registration of any Muslim group. The council also noted that the provisions might infringe on the constitutional right to freely disseminate religious beliefs.

In an early 2005 meeting with imams from throughout the country, President Nursultan Nazarbayev reportedly stated that Sunni mosques should affiliate with the SAMK. In May 2005 the press reported that the akim (governor) of Southern Kazakhstan Oblast, along with heads of regional law enforcement agencies, met with imams of mosques in that oblast in an effort to pressure nonaligned imams and congregations to join the SAMK to ensure liturgical orthodoxy. There were unconfirmed reports that other oblast akims held similar meetings with imams to encourage affiliation with the SAMK. On several occasions the chief mufti publicly deplored the proliferation of nontraditional religions, which he defined as any congregation not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church or with the SAMK. During a May conference on Sufism in Iran and Central Asia, several local Sufis reportedly accused the SAMK of promoting "Wahhabism" and intolerance among Muslims, a charge the SAMK publicly denied. Notwithstanding SAMK influence and pressure, during the reporting period the Government registered 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. Under July 2005 amendments to the religion law, local and foreign missionaries are 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 for the sponsoring religious organization and a 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 institutions." Foreigners are permitted under the law to register religious organizations; however, they generally are required to list a majority of local citizens among the ten founders of the organization.

During the reporting period one group reported difficulty in obtaining registration for a missionary who moved from Southern Kazakhstan Oblast to Almaty. The missionary was registered to work in Almaty in May 2006. Two groups reported that foreign missionaries were denied entry into the country based upon another government's addition of these missionaries to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) visa blacklist which the Government is bound by treaty obligations to honor. In one case, the missionary had worked in the country for more than ten years and his family was living in Karaganda. Many foreign missionaries reported good cooperation with local and national authorities.

The Government does not permit religious instruction in public schools. Children must attend secular schools through high school; some secular schools are private. Homeschooling is not permitted, except for children at the preschool level and for noncitizen children. Parents may enroll children in supplemental religious education classes provided by registered religious organizations.

The July 2005 national security amendments include a provision that religious training of a child shall not cause damage to a child's all-around development or physical or moral health. However, they do not clarify how such damage should be judged or which agency would make such a determination. The current law does not allow religious groups to educate children without approval from the Ministry of Education. This makes lack of such approval a ground for refusing to register a religious organization whose charter includes provisions for religious education. In early 2005 the Ministry of Education issued a circular instructing teachers to be alert in detecting behavior that indicated children were being exposed to political or religious extremism. There were unconfirmed reports that similar instructions were reiterated during the reporting period, although there were no reports of legal proceedings resulting from teachers reporting on students' religious 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, a service not provided by the Government. The Government has donated buildings, land, and provided other assistance for the construction of new mosques, synagogues, and Russian Orthodox churches.

The Government invited the national leaders of the two largest religious groups, Islam and Russian Orthodoxy, to participate jointly in some state events; Roman Catholic and Jewish leaders have been included in such events as well. Leaders of other religious groups, including Baptists, Presbyterians, Seventh-day Adventists, and other nontraditional religious groups, at times also have participated in some events.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the amended religion law, the Government may deny registration based upon an insufficient number of adherents or inconsistencies between the provisions of a religious organization's charter and the law. Under the law on public associations, a registered organization, including a religious group, may have all activities suspended by court order for a period of three to six months for defiance of the constitution or laws or for systematic pursuit of activities that contradict the charter and bylaws of the organization as registered. In February 2005 the parliament amended this law to empower police, procurators, and citizens to petition a court to suspend the activities of a registered organization for failure to rectify violations or for repeated violations of the law. This amendment was passed at the same time as the extremism law was adopted.

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. The Government usually claimed that religious groups' charters did not meet the requirements of the law when refusing or significantly delaying registration. In several cases authorities cited discrepancies between Russian and Kazakh language versions of a group's charter or referred a charter for expert examination.

Article 375 of the Administrative Code allows authorities to suspend the activities or fine the leaders of unregistered groups. Recent amendments to the religion law

incorporate language consistent with Article 375. During the period covered by this report, unregistered denominations reported an increase in cases filed under Article 375. As in previous years, the court of first instance often acquitted the accused. Religious groups reported cases filed under Article 374–1, a related provision added to the Administrative Code by the July 2005 national security amendments, which carries significantly heavier fines than Article 375. Local authorities have broad discretion in determining whether to file charges for nonregistered religious activity under Article 375 or 374–1, which was applied unevenly in different localities.

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 by any religious groups inspected. Where religious groups operated as legal entities, such as by running collective farms and restaurants or operating orphanages, authorities conducted health, sanitation, and other inspections relevant to the nature of the entities' operations. 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.

Although the national Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center noted generally positive relations with the central Government, the group 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 thirteen (of fourteen) oblasts, the center has attempted unsuccessfully since 2001 to register in Atyrau Oblast. Its most recent application was turned down in December 2005 based on incomplete registration materials. The Jehovah's Witnesses claimed that local officials sometimes denied the group permits to rent stadiums and other large public or private sites for religious meetings. However, the Center also reported that government treatment of these requests varied. No other religious groups have reported similar instances of being denied permits for public gatherings.

There were reports that local representatives of the KNB or police officials disrupted 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.

During the reporting period the Council of Churches noted several court cases against churchgoers for participating in the activities of an unregistered group. When individuals were found to be guilty of violating Article 375 of the administrative code, courts imposed a fine. Council of Churches members usually refused to pay fines levied by courts for nonregistration. Although the Government generally did not enforce payment of the fines, in one instance authorities imposed a three-day jail sentence.

Although the Hare Krishna movement was registered at the national and local levels, leaders reported continuing harassment by the local government in the form of repeated lawsuits seeking confiscation of land in Almaty Oblast used as a communal farm. In April 2006 an appeals court upheld a lower court decision that the land should revert to the Karasai regional akimat (equivalent to a county 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. On April 25, 2006, local officials went to the commune to evict the followers. Hare Krishna followers peacefully resisted and local authorities did not escalate the situation through force. The Hare Krishnas claimed that the local government targeted the commune because they were a nontraditional religious community. They cited statements by local officials, such as an April 25, 2006, interview with Channel 31 in which a Karasai akimat official stated that the Hare Krishnas were "not accepted as a religion," and that they were dangerous for the country. Independent religious observers, however, believed that the cases are motivated primarily by a financial interest in the land, the value of which has appreciated significantly since 1999. Human rights advocates and international observers brought the issue to the attention of national officials. At the end of the reporting period, the Government had not evicted the residents from the commune and the Hare Krishnas' appeal was pending before the Supreme Court.

Prior to the land confiscation lawsuits, the Hare Krishnas reported tense relations with Karasai akimat authorities, which they believe resulted in the community being subject to frequent inspections. In 2004 the Hare Krishna commune was the subject of eleven inspections by different government agencies including the police, fire protection service, sanitary agency, environment protection agency, and land committee, and subsequently fined for various violations. The Hare Krishnas admitted several violations, which they attempted to rectify but maintained that they had been subjected to closer scrutiny than their neighbors.

Observers believe that security officials informally monitor some religious activity, particularly Muslim imams' sermons; however, no suggestion has been made that any monitoring had the character of interference or harassment.

The Ahmadi Muslim community reported difficulties in obtaining visas and registration for a foreign missionary and his family. In November 2005 foreign missionary Syed Hasan Tahir Bukhari, also known as Asan Takhir Sayid Bukhari, moved from Southern Kazakhstan Oblast to Almaty. His initial application to register in Almaty was denied based on incomplete materials and out-of-date documents. Bukhari was registered in Almaty in May 2006 after government liaison officials assisted the Ahmadis in completing his registration.

Both the national government and the national Muslim organization SAMK deny that there is any official connection between them. However, the Government has sought several times in recent years, in the form of proposed amendments to the religion law, to have the organization assume a quasi-official role by requiring it to determine which Muslim groups be allowed to register with authorities and to approve the construction of new mosques. In 2002 the Constitutional Council ruled that these provisions of the proposed amendments were unconstitutional; however, several akims were reported to have exerted pressure on imams and mosques to align themselves with the SAMK.

Several religious groups, including unregistered Baptists, Hare Krishnas, and Jehovah's Witnesses, reported that they had been the subject of news accounts portraying them, or nontraditional religions in general, as a threat to security or society. Some of the news accounts appeared in government-controlled media. However, news accounts relating to the April 25, 2006, attempted eviction of Hare Krishnas from their commune were generally sympathetic to the group, including accounts appearing 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 who were not registered as missionaries who were engaged in proselytizing; however, such actions were limited to the confiscation of religious literature, fines, and brief detentions.

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 and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Despite legislative setbacks in 2005, the country has out performed other former Soviet Union nations in its encouragement of religious tolerance and its respect for the rights of religious minorities. Religious leaders praised the role the Government played in ensuring their groups' right to the peaceful practice of religious beliefs. Some perceived the former Chairman of the Secretariat of the Council on Relations with Religious Communities, now the deputy head of the newly organized RIC, and the Ombudsman's Office, as advocates for religious freedom within the Government. In each of the fourteen oblasts, the equivalent of state governments, and in the two cities with independent administrations, Astana and Almaty, the local government (akimat) included a liaison for religious communities. Several of these liaisons were cited by religious groups as a resource for assistance in navigating registration and other laws, while akimat officials in other oblasts were described as unhelpful or intrusive. Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including the Almaty Helsinki Foundation and the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR), assisted religious groups, including providing legal assistance for registration.

National and regional (oblast) officials, including RIC officials, continued to intervene in cases of restriction or harassment of religious groups by local officials. The frequency of higher†level intervention has generally reduced harassment of religious groups at the local level. During the period covered by this report, continued activism by national and regional officials resolved conflicts between nontraditional religious groups and local authorities.

President Nazarbayev announced in September 2003 that he would continue his "Peace and Harmony" initiative by hosting the second Congress of World Religions in Astana in September 2006 and by inviting several previously unrepresented groups. Nazarbayev regularly made public statements highlighting and praising the country's tradition of interethnic and interfaith tolerance. The president remains engaged with international religious leaders and communities.

In June 2006 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs co-hosted an OSCE Implementation Meeting in Almaty on religious tolerance. Religious leaders reported plans to begin building several large houses of worship during the coming year, including a new Russian Orthodox cathedral in Astana, a new synagogue complex in Almaty, and a new synagogue in Ust-Kamenogorsk.

According to government statistics, the number of registered religious groups has risen steadily over the last few years. In January 2006 there were 3,420 groups, compared with 3,259 in 2005 and 3,157 in 2004. The Union of Baptists, for example, grew from 254 registered affiliated groups in 2003 to 272 in 2006.

The Government made efforts to promote religious tolerance in its ranks. Human rights training provided to law enforcement officers by 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 country's chief rabbi consistently praised the Government for its proactive protection of the Jewish community. He previously stated publicly that in his more than ten years in the country, he had never faced a single case of anti-Semitism. Other than the actions of members of the extremist HT political movement, who printed and distributed leaflets that supported anti-Semitism among other beliefs, there were no reports of anti-Semitic incitement or acts during the year.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The country is multiethnic, with a long tradition of tolerance and secularism. Since independence, the number of mosques and churches has increased greatly. The population, particularly in rural areas, is sometimes wary of nontraditional religions.

In 2004 the media reported a conflict between missionaries from Missionary Center Grace Rakhim and local Muslims in a village in Akmola Oblast. The missionaries, who identified themselves as Presbyterian Christians, were reportedly threatened, beaten, and exiled from the village when they attempted to convert local residents. In general Grace Rakhim Church reported good relations between its missionaries and the community during the reporting period. Akimat officials in Karaganda Oblast, where Grace Church has its national headquarters, invited church leaders to public functions and publicly praised the work of the church during meetings with U.S. embassy officials.

Several members of parliament were quoted in the press expressing suspicion of nontraditional religions, including the Jehovah's Witnesses and Evangelical Christian movements. Leaders of the four traditional 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 of such mistrust leading to violence.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. officials emphasized that bilateral cooperation on economic and security 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 any legislation relating to religious freedom be drafted through a transparent legislative process, and that it reflect the country's international commitments to respect individuals' right to peaceful expression of religion.

U.S. officials expressed concern at high levels over the extremism law prior to its passage in early 2005. Following passage of the law, U.S. officials remained engaged with the Government to encourage that the law be implemented in a manner that least restricted religious practice.

The ambassador and other embassy officials coordinated with other embassies and international human rights organizations to 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 implementing regulations for legislation that had implications for the religious community, including the national security amendments that were enacted in July 2005. The ambassador gave several interviews in which he publicly reiterated the U.S. position against legislation that did not appear to meet international standards for protecting religious freedom and other fundamental rights.

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, and embassy officials consistently raised cases of local harassment with government officials, who generally worked to resolve these cases, ensuring 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.

In his preface to a documentary on Muslims in America by regional broadcaster Mir TV, the ambassador emphasized, "Freedom of religion is one of the most fundamental values of the American way of life," and praised the film for showing the wisdom of community leaders who demonstrated how to separate extremist ideologies from the peaceful observance of the Muslim faith. The documentary was produced by three journalists who traveled to the United States on a U.S. Government program in the fall of 2005, where they collected material on Islam in America. In early 2006 the finished product was broadcast on local television news in all CIS countries except Turkmenistan.

The ambassador toured houses of worship and met with religious leaders during trips to regional (oblast) capitals throughout the year. 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. officials 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.

In July 2005 the embassy provided grant support to the Youth Center for Support of Democracy to create a Center for Religious Tolerance in Shymkent, the capital of Southern Kazakhstan Oblast, where 30 percent of the country's registered mosques are located. The April 27, 2006, Center opening was attended by leaders from the local religious community and was covered by local media. Members of the community have access to books, reference materials, and other publications about world religions, in addition to materials about sociology, theology, and religious anthropology. The center offers monthly seminars on topics such as the role of religion in democracies and the role of religion in helping resolve social issues; staff members conduct interreligious forums and roundtables with religious and public leaders to discuss urgent social and political questions. In addition, the center provides Internet access for students, teachers, and others doing research on theology and religious tolerance.

In 2004 the U.S. Government added a religious component to its overall development strategy for the country. Implementing organizations and a regional religion, state and society (RSS) specialist, based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, have been working to increase outreach to religious communities in Shymkent. During the reporting period, the RSS specialist toured Shymkent with religious leaders and continued to publicize the scope of implementing organizations' contributions, including civil society development, which these partners provide. In addition, embassy officials held meetings with implementing organizations and staff to encourage partners to reach out to local religious leaders in their work, where appropriate. In June 2006 the U.S. Government sponsored the participation of a government official and several local Muslim leaders in a regional conference on "The Role of Religion in Promoting Peace and Stability," held in Tajikistan.

During the period covered by this report, the embassy conducted exchange programs for religious leaders and human rights observers, and cosponsored several reunions for alumni of past exchange programs. These included Muslim religious leaders and teachers who attended programs in 2003 and 2004 on "Islam in America" that included tours of U.S. cities and meetings with American religious leaders.

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 secu-

rity. The constitution provides for a secular state and the separation of religion and state. The Government does not support any religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to monitor and restrict Islamist groups that it considered to be threats. In April 2004, then Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev signed a decree and plan of action aimed at "combating religious extremism" from 2004 to 2005. The decree outlined responsibilities of various government agencies directed at detection and prevention of terrorism and religious extremism, including creating a database of foreign religious extremist organizations, conducting an information campaign, and preventing inter- and intra-faith conflicts. According to the State Agency for Religious Affairs (SARA)—called the State Commission on Religious Affairs, or SCRA, until November 2005—the decree expired in April 2005 and was no longer enforced.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Some tensions occurred between Muslims and former Muslims who had converted to other faiths.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as a part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, the U.S. embassy continued to monitor progress 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 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that monitor religious freedom. The ambassador frequently participated in outreach activities to various religious groups and promoted tolerance among the various faiths.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 77,181 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.1 million. The latest official data from the National Statistics Committee indicated the following ethnic breakdown: Kyrgyz, 67.4 percent; Uzbeks, 14.2 percent; Russians, 10.3 percent; Dungans (ethnic Chinese Muslims), 1.1 percent; Uighurs (ethnic Turkic Muslims), 1 percent; and other ethnicities, 6.4 percent.

Islam is the most widely held faith. Official sources estimate that up to 80 percent of inhabitants are Muslim. The majority of Muslims are Sunni; there are few Shi'a in the country (approximately one thousand). According to the SARA, as of May 2006 there were an estimated 1,643 mosques, of which 1,623 were registered. There also were seven institutes for higher Islamic teaching. According to recent official estimates, approximately 11 percent of the population is Russian Orthodox, although some experts believe the figure could be as low as 8 percent. The country has forty-four Russian Orthodox churches, one Russian Orthodox monastery for women, and one parochial school. The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates thirty churches throughout the country. Jews, Buddhists, and Roman Catholics account for an estimated 3 percent of the population, and they practice their religions openly in one synagogue, one temple, and three churches, respectively. In addition, there are 265 registered Protestant houses of worship. Protestant congregations include Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, nondenominational Protestants, Presbyterians, and Charismatics. There are twelve registered Baha'i houses of worship.

The small Jewish congregation in Bishkek organizes informal cultural studies and humanitarian services, chiefly food assistance for its elderly. There also are syncretistic religious practices. Most notably there is a Baptist church in the Naryn region whose followers are predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz. While they worship as Christians, they have incorporated Muslim modes of prayer into their rituals. There is no official estimate of the number of atheists.

Islam is practiced widely throughout the country in both urban and rural areas. Russian Orthodoxy typically is concentrated in cities with a larger ethnic Russian population. Other faiths also are practiced more commonly in the cities where their smaller communities tend to be concentrated. There is a correlation between ethnicity and religion; ethnic Kyrgyz are primarily Muslims, while ethnic Russians usually belong to either the Russian Orthodox Church or one of the Protestant denominations. While the majority claims to follow Islam, a significant number of Muslims appear to be only nominal believers and identify with the faith out of historical or ethnic allegiance. A significant number of Russian Orthodox adherents also appear to be only nominal believers.

A number of missionary groups operate. The SARA has registered missionaries from the Republic of Korea, Great Britain, the United States, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, India, Kazakhstan, Taiwan, Tajikistan, and Russia. They represent an estimated twenty religious groups and denominations, including Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Korean Presbyterians. According to the SARA, since 1996 it has reg-

istered approximately 1,133 missionaries, of whom an estimated 870 were Christian and 263 were Muslim. During the period covered by this report, eighty-five missionaries, of whom sixty-two were Christian and twenty-three were Muslim, conducted activities. According to official statistics, since independence, authorities ordered approximately twenty missionaries, who disseminated dogma inconsistent with the traditional customs of local Muslims, to leave the country. However, during the reporting period no missionaries were expelled, asked to leave the country, or denied registration. All missionaries previously expelled represented various "totalitarian sects," groups the SCRA considered incompatible with the standard principles of traditional world religions.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion; however, the Government at times restricted this right in practice, in particular for Muslim groups it considered to be threats. The constitution provides for a secular state and for the separation of religion and state, and the Government does not support any particular religion. Article 8 of the constitution prohibits the formation of political parties on religious and ethnic grounds, as well as activities of religious organizations that jeopardize the state, constitutional system, or national security. Article 82 of the constitution provides the constitutional court with the authority to determine whether a religious organization should be prohibited.

The Government recognizes three Muslim holy days (Noorus, Kurman Ait or Eid al-Adha, and Orozo Ait or Eid al-Fitr) and one Russian Orthodox holy day (Orthodox Christmas, which is observed on January 7) 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.

The SARA promotes religious tolerance, protects freedom of conscience, and oversees the application of laws on religion. Members of the agency are appointed by the prime minister. A 1997 presidential decree requires the registration of all religious organizations with the SARA, following approval from the Constitutional Court. While SARA is the only government agency that has the right to register a religious entity within Kyrgyzstan, it has no authority to declare a religious group unqualified. It can, however, 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 do hold regular services without government interference.

Organizations applying for registration must have at least ten members who are adult citizens and must submit an application form, organizational charter, minutes of an institutional meeting, and a list of founding members. Each congregation must register separately. A religious organization then must complete a registration process with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to obtain status as a legal entity, which is necessary to own property, open bank accounts, and otherwise engage in contractual activities. If a religious organization engages in commercial activity, it is required to pay taxes. In practice the MOJ has never registered a religious organization without prior registration by the SARA. The registration process with the SARA is often cumbersome, taking one month on average, but in the past it sometimes took up to several years. According to SARA regulations, registration is rejected if a religious organization does not comply with the law or is a threat to national security, social stability, interethnic and interdenominational harmony, public order, health, or morality. An applicant whose registration is denied may reapply, and may appeal to the courts.

In 2004 the Government created a website that documented the religious organizations operating in the country. According to the SARA, there were more than 2,081 registered religious entities, including mosques, churches, foundations, NGOs of a religious nature, and religious educational institutions. Of these, 347 were Christian. The SARA reported that its staff continued to travel around the country to help unregistered religious entities prepare applications for registration. The most recent registration information provided by SARA identified 1,725 Islamic entities (including 1 university), 46 entities belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church, more than 300 "nontraditional" Christian churches, 2 Russian churches of "Old Belief," 3 Catholic churches, 1 synagogue, 1 Buddhist church, and 292 Protestant churches (48 Baptist, 20 Lutheran, 45 Pentecostal, 30 Adventist, 18 Presbyterian, 16 "Charismatic" churches, 41 Jehovah's Witnesses, and 22 "other" Protestant churches). In addition, SARA states that, in Kyrgyzstan, there are twenty-one "other religious entities," including twelve Baha'i centers, plus twenty-one religious centers

of "other foreign confessions," thirteen religious schools, and seven religious foundations and unions. Although there has been a history of several groups, including the Catholic Church (RCC), having difficulties registering, all, including the RCC, were eventually registered, except for the Hare Krishnas, who continued to have difficulties. Since 1996 SARA has registered more than 1,137 foreign citizens as religious missionaries.

In December 2005 the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reported ongoing problems in its efforts to register with the SARA; problems which remained unresolved at the end of the reporting period. The church initially submitted its application for registration in August 2004.

The Church of Jesus Christ is the country's largest Protestant church with approximately ten affiliates and an estimated eleven thousand members, of whom approximately 40 percent are ethnic Kyrgyz. At the end of the period covered by this report, the main church in Bishkek was registered, along with ten affiliates. The church reported that over the past year, ten other affiliates decided to become independent congregations and not be affiliated with the church.

Members of registered religious groups may undergo alternative military service; it was reported in the press that approximately three thousand persons apply annually.

Missionary groups of various religious groups operate freely, although they are required to register with the Government.

The Government forbids the teaching of religion (or atheism) in public schools. In 2001 the Government instructed the SCRA to draw up programs for training clergy and to prepare methodologies for teaching about religions in public schools. These instructions came in response to concerns about the spread of Wahhabism and what the Government 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. The SARA indicated that it was still developing a curriculum to teach about religions, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and several academic institutions; however, the program had not been implemented because of lack of funding. Volunteers visited villages in the south to teach traditional Islamic values.

In 2003 the SCRA and the state muftiate granted the Islamic Institute the status of a university, which gave it authority over other Islamic institutes in the country and allowed it to develop a more standardized curriculum. In 2004 the Islamic University (previously called the Islamic Institute) began a program to oversee all Islamic schools, including madrassahs. As part of the program, the Islamic University oversees curriculum development and tries to maintain a more standardized curriculum among all Islamic schools. It also declared that one of its goals is to check the spread of extremist religious teaching. This program continued during the reporting period. The Government worked through the SARA to promote interfaith dialogue and encourage religious tolerance. The SARA hosted meetings of religious groups to bring different faiths together in open forums, and it assisted them in working together on programs for the protection of the poor and the elderly.

Since 2001 the Government has worked with representatives of various religious groups and NGOs on a draft law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," which is ostensibly a response to concerns about terrorism and other illegal activities committed by groups disguised as religious organizations. In May 2006 a different draft bill was initiated by another group of deputies. Work on the new draft bill continued at the end of the reporting period.

In August 2005 President Bakiyev signed into law legislation designed to "halt extremist activities by religious organizations or groups." However, government officials, including at the SARA, were unable to provide any details on how the law was being enforced or what actions had been taken under the law.

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 "Wahhabis." The Government perceives Islamists to be a threat to national stability, particularly in the south, and fears that they seek to overthrow the secular government and establish an Islamic theocracy. Armed incursions in 1999 and 2000 by members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a terrorist organization, increased the Government's concern regarding political Islam and the actions of militant Islamic groups. In contrast to previous reporting periods, the Government expressed no concern over the growing number of Christian groups.

In December 2004 police raided houses in Osh and the Aravan and Nookat districts, areas of traditional Islamic beliefs, following a November 2004 incident in which a suspect threw a grenade at police while trying to escape. Officials maintained the November incident was perpetrated by Islamic extremists. Local human rights observers disputed these claims, and alleged that the incident was being used to discriminate against Muslims as well as the Uzbek minority. In April 2006 police in Osh Oblast arrested twelve men, allegedly for links to the 2004 grenade incident. Eight men arrested were released within days, but the four others remain in custody and are awaiting trial.

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, the Islamic Party of Turkestan, the Organization for Freeing Eastern Turkestan, and the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party.

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 Church of Jesus Christ reported that it had resolved favorably an ongoing dispute with the Bishkek mayor's office over the land on which the main church in the city is located. In 2006 the church signed a forty-nine-year lease for use of the land.

The Unification Church remains active, despite the SCRA suspension of its activities in 2003 for registration irregularities, which was 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.

In 2004 the Government signed a decree and plan of action instructing the National Security Service (SNB) to propose measures to "restrict and prevent the activities of missionaries who propagate religious fundamentalism and extremism as well as reactionary and Shi'ite ideas." However, the decree period ended in April 2005, and was thereafter no longer in effect.

Despite announcing in 2004 that the Government would create a special board to review religious literature, it took no further action. The SARA confirmed in June 2006 that no board had been created.

The SARA stated that students, who for religious reasons choose to wear clothing that would indicate adherence to a particular religion, may attend religious schools. Conversely, according to press reports, local officials in the Jalalabad Oblast town of Distuk tried to prevent girls from wearing hijabs to school.

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. As of the end of the reporting period, the dispute continued.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of the two major religious groups, Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church, respect each other's major holy days and exchange holy day greetings.

There was no evidence of widespread societal discrimination or violence against members of different religious groups; however, there was evidence of periodic tension in rural areas between conservative Muslims and foreign Christian missionaries and individuals from traditionally Muslim ethnic groups who had converted to other faiths. The U.S. embassy was unable to confirm the Forum 18 online news report that Saktinbai Usmanov was killed for having converted from Islam to Christianity. Police reportedly had no leads in the case but were continuing their investigation. Both Muslim and Russian Orthodox spiritual leaders criticized the proselytizing activities of nontraditional Christian groups; however, in 2004 the press reported that at least one Muslim spiritual leader of the Jalalabad region, Haji Dilmurod, intervened to prevent the stoning of a group of converts to Jehovah's Witnesses by local youths. During the period covered by this report, there were no acts

of violence, harassment, or vandalism reported against Jewish persons, community institutions, schools, synagogues, or cemeteries.

In April 2005 a group of Islamic extremists attacked a rehabilitation center for former convicts near Bishkek. The group attacked the center after they mistook it as a front for Christian missionaries. Local police and SNB officials responded quickly to defend the center, which thereafter continued to operate normally.

Despite appeals in the past for the expulsion of Protestants, and Kyrgyz TV broadcasts that disparaged Protestants, there were no similar appeals or programs aired during the period covered by this report.

In previous years it was reported that Protestant missionaries working in the south aroused particular concern among some devout local Uzbeks, and that Muslims were angered that the authorities monitored and arrested alleged Islamic extremists but did not interfere with the work of Protestant groups. However, no similar incidents were reported during the period covered in this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. embassy continued to monitor the legislative progress 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 January 10, 2006, the deputy chief of mission addressed, in the Kyrgyz language, thousands of Muslims who had gathered to pray in the main square of Bishkek for Eid al-Adha. His speech, which highlighted the importance of respect for different religious groups, received positive coverage in the largest-circulation newspaper in the country.

A U.S. Government-funded institutional partnership continued between the Social Sciences Research Council and the Islamic University in Bishkek to supplement the religious curriculum with an international curriculum to include math, English, and a course on comparative world religions, and to establish exchange visits between university teachers in the two countries. In 2006 the council purchased computer equipment for the Islamic University. American professors are scheduled to visit the Islamic University. In June 2005 the Social Sciences Research Council organized a three-week summer institute in Kazan, Russia, where four theology professors from the Islamic University, American University in Central Asia, and Osh State University were invited to participate.

During the period covered by the report, the embassy distributed publications in Russian and Kyrgyz about Muslim life in the United States and conducted several presentations for students of theology departments in Bishkek and Southern provinces. In July 2005 a group of Muslim leaders from Batken, Naryn, and Bishkek traveled to the United States to participate in an International Visitors Program on religious tolerance and diversity. Batken contains a majority of the Muslim population in the country. The International Visitors met with 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.

The U.S.-sponsored Democracy Commission funded forty-nine grants to local NGOs, one of which produced a documentary film in Kyrgyz, Russian, and Uzbek about religious extremism in Central Asia. The film was broadcast on the "Mir" TV channel, and distributed through Internews, a U.S. Government grantee.

In April 2006 the embassy organized a U.S. Speaker Program with Ahmed Younis from the U.S.-based Muslim Public Affairs Council, who spoke about Muslims in America during his five-day stay in the country. Younis visited mosques, madrassahs, and universities and met with Muslim leaders and government officials to discuss religious tolerance, interfaith peace, rights of Muslims, and the need to battle extremist interpretations of Islam.

MALDIVES

The 1997 Constitution designates Islam as the official state religion. The Government interprets this provision to impose a requirement that citizens be Muslims. Freedom of religion is restricted significantly. The law prohibits the practice of any

religion other than Islam. The president is the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." Government regulations are based on Islamic law (Shari'a). Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to practice their religion only privately. Visitors must also refrain from encouraging local citizens to practice any 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.

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 is an archipelago of approximately 1,200 coral atolls and islands scattered over 500 square miles in the Indian Ocean southwest of India, with a population estimated at 350 thousand.

The population was a distinct ethnic group with historical roots in South Indian, Sinhalese, and Arab communities. The vast majority of the Muslim population practiced Sunni Islam. Non-Muslim foreigners, including more than 500 thousand tourists who visited annually (predominantly Europeans and Japanese) and approximately 31 thousand foreign workers (mainly Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, and Bangladeshis), were in general allowed to practice their religions only in private. While Muslim tourists and Muslim foreign workers were allowed to attend local mosque services, most practiced Islam in private or at mosques located at the resorts where they worked and lived.

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. The constitution also stipulates that the president must be Sunni and has the "supreme authority to propagate the tenets of Islam." 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. 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. Most mosques were also funded and maintained by the Government.

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 the body 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 no religion other than Islam should be allowed in the country. During previous reporting periods, the

Home Affairs Ministry announced special programs to safeguard and strengthen religious identity. The Government established the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs to provide guidance on religious matters. The Government also set standards for imams who conduct Friday services at mosques so that 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.

Parents must raise their children to be Muslim because citizens must be Muslim. Foreigners can raise their children to follow any religion as long as they practice only privately in their homes or hotel rooms and do not try to include local citizens in their worship.

The Government prohibited non-Muslim clergy and missionaries from proselytizing or conducting public worship services. Islamic proselytizing was also illegal unless the Government invited someone to discuss the religion. Conversion of a Muslim to another faith is a violation of Shari'a and may result in a loss of the convert's citizenship; however, there were no known cases of the Government discovering converts and rescinding citizenship as a result of conversion. Faith-based nongovernmental organizations were not specifically excluded by law from operating; however, in March 2006, the local press reported that the fisheries minister called on citizens to raze a marketplace structure constructed by a British firm. The organization had received funding from the UK-based charity Maldives Aid. According to the press, the minister claimed the building was donated by a "Christian missionary" group, a label Maldives Aid strongly refuted. Maldives Aid made public appeals to the people and the Government to retain the market building in order to benefit the populace. On May 3, 2006, Maldives Aid held a small ceremony to transfer the building's ownership to island residents. There was no action taken against the marketplace building by the end of the reporting period.

In the previous reporting period, when Friends of Maldives, a United Kingdom-based charity, had British school children pack buckets of school materials for children in the country, the Government inspected the packages, found Christmas stories, and removed the stories before the buckets were distributed.

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) must be Muslim; however, they are not required to be Sunni.

Under the country's Islamic practice, the testimony of two women is required to equal that of one man in matters involving Shari'a such as adultery, finance, and inheritance. In other cases, the testimony of men and women is equal. Shari'a also governs 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."

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

Most citizens regarded Islam as one of their society's most distinctive characteristics and believed that it promotes harmony and national identity. The president regularly encouraged 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 traveled 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

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The constitution describes the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it does not establish Hinduism as the state religion. The Government generally did not interfere with the practice of other religious groups and religious tolerance was broadly observed; however, there were some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. When King Gyanendra handed power back to the political parties in April 2006, the reinstated parliament declared the country to be a secular state; however, no laws specifically affecting freedom of religion were changed.

Article 19 of the Constitution of 1990 states that "Everyone shall have the freedom to profess and practice his own religion as handed down to him having due regard to ancient practices; provided that no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another," thus effectively prohibiting proselytism.

Members of minority religions occasionally reported police harassment.

Authorities limited the location of and otherwise restricted many public celebrations by the Tibetan community, especially those with political overtones. The Government did not allow the registration of an office to look after Tibetan refugees or an office to represent the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader. Both offices were shut down by the Government in 2005 based on claims that the organizations had failed to comply with nongovernmental organization (NGO) registration requirements.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Adherents of the country's many religious groups generally coexisted peacefully and respected all places of worship. Those who converted to another religious group at times faced isolated incidents of violence and occasionally were ostracized socially, but generally they 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, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, and other religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 54,363 square miles, and its population was estimated at 27 million. It was estimated that Hindus constituted 81 percent of the population; Buddhists, mostly ethnic Tibetan, 11 percent; Muslims, in their majority Sunni, 4.2 percent; and practitioners of Kirant (an indigenous animist religion) and others, 4 percent, of which 0.45 percent were Christian. Christian denominations were few but growing. Christian leaders estimated the number of adherents at approximately 400 thousand. Press reports indicate that 170 Christian churches operated in Kathmandu alone. The growth of other religious groups was harder to document because the last census was taken in 2001. Twenty thousand Tibetan Buddhist refugees resided in the country.

Proselytism is illegal; therefore, there were no missionaries officially located in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and permits the practice of all religions; however, there are some restrictions. The newly restored parliament declared the country a secular state in May 2006; however, the country's constitution had not been amended by the end of the period covered by this report and continues to describe the country as a "Hindu Kingdom," although it does not establish Hinduism as the state religion. The constitution does protect the rights of all religious groups by guaranteeing the individual the right "to profess and practice his own religion as handed down to him 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."

The constitution stipulates that the "state shall not discriminate among citizens on the basis of caste. No person shall on the basis of caste be discriminated against, be denied access to any public place, or be deprived of the use of public utilities. Any contravention of this provision shall be punishable by law." In March 2002, the Government constituted a National Dalit Commission charged with protecting and

promoting dalit (formerly called "untouchable") rights, and ensuring active participation of the dalit community in the development of the country by uplifting all the dalits. The commission devises legal and policy arrangements for dalit rights, makes recommendations to implement international documents to which the country is a party, monitors and coordinates NGOs on efforts to uplift dalits, and launches programs on social awareness to end social discrimination and untouchability. The Press and Publications Act prohibits the publication of materials that create animosity among persons of different castes or religions.

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 registration requirements for NGOs. As a result of the constitutional prohibition against proselytism, it appears the Government does not allow organizations to register using religious words within their titles. Christian religious organizations claim that unless registered, such organizations are restricted from owning land, an important step for establishing churches or burial sites. Other non-Hindu groups have not made similar claims.

In view of the illegality of proselytism, there were 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. If foreign workers were found to proselytize, they were expelled from the country. The Government applied these laws on immigration closely. Many foreign Christian organizations had direct ties to local churches and sponsor 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.

Public schools did not teach religion.

The Government had no formal policy on interfaith understanding. A local NGO, the Inter-religious Council 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 the Bhouddhanath stupa as part of religious ceremonies. The Government restricted to private places (school grounds or inside monasteries) all of the local Tibetan celebrations (Tibetan New Year, the Dalai Lama's birthday, Democracy Day, and International Human Rights Day). In 2005, the Government closed two unregistered offices in Kathmandu associated with the Dalai Lama: The office of the Dalai Lama's representative and the Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office, claiming that the organizations did not comply with registration requirements. During the reporting period, the Government did not allow the registration of an office to look after Tibetan refugees or an office to represent the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader. The welfare office looked after more than 20 thousand Tibetan refugees who left their homeland after the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1959.

Christian groups reported that government officials refused to register any religious organizations whose titles contained the words "Jesus, Bible, Christian, or church." These groups noted that, unless registered, such organizations could not own land, important for establishing churches or burial of members. However, by removing Christian related words from their titles, some groups were able to register their organizations and practice their faith. Some Christians buried their dead in Christian cemeteries in Kathmandu and other areas around the country, and others used cremation.

Parents were not prevented from teaching their religion of choice to their children, who also may live a religious life.

Article 113.3 of the 1991 Constitution states "the election commission shall not register any political organization or party that discriminates in membership against any citizen on the basis of religion, caste, tribe, language, or sex, or that

has a name, insignia, flag, or objective that is religious or tends to fragment the country."

The law prohibits converting others and proselytizing; these activities are punishable by fines, imprisonment, or, for foreigners, expulsion. However, personal conversion is allowed. NGOs or individuals were allowed to file charges of proselytism against individuals or organizations.

Some Christian groups were concerned that the ban on proselytism limited the expression of non-Hindu religious belief. The Government investigated reports of proselytism. There were no incidents of punishment for conversion or proselytism during the reporting period. On April 27, 2005, police arrested a couple and investigated them for allegedly forcibly converting children. After being held in custody for several days, they were released by police on May 9, 2005. No charges were filed against them.

Muslim religious schools (madrassahs) but not mosques, must register with local District Administration Offices (part of the Home Ministry) and supply information about their funding sources in order to 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 remains frequently practiced at Hindu temples, where dalits are forbidden from entering by some Hindu priests. Lower castes also experience discrimination in many other areas of life, including education, employment, and marriage. Other religious communities do not practice caste discrimination. Entrance into many Hindu temples is often restricted for persons not of South Asian ethnicity, who are unlikely to be Hindu.

There were no restrictions on the selling or possession of religious literature.

Civil servants can take off religious holidays and celebrate them on private property without government interference.

There were no laws that apply only to certain religious groups.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

During the period covered by this report, Maoist insurgents restricted religious freedom in parts of the country. There were regular reports of Maoists enforcing a "people's calendar" in schools that did not allow for religious holidays. Maoists sometimes demanded the use of religious organization grounds for their indoctrination programs, threatening to padlock the buildings if their demands were refused.

There were scattered reports of Maoist insurgents attacking Hindu temples and harassing Hindu priests during the reporting period.

The National Churches Fellowship of Nepal reported several cases where Maoists extorted cash from churches, including in Dhading and Surkhet Districts. The Maoists threatened retribution against church property and church members if the congregations did not meet their demands.

On May 17, 2004, a group of Maoists abducted a Royal Nepal Army priest from Ramechhap District. He was held for several days before being released unharmed.

On September 12, 2004, Maoists exploded a bomb and forced the closure of St. Joseph's school in Pokhara. The school's 551 students mostly were from underprivileged ethnic communities. No case was filed.

In September 2004, Maoist threats prompted the temporary closing of twenty-one churches in Sankhuwasabha District.

On December 29, 2004, Maoists shot dead Arun Budhathoki, Chief of Shiv Sena Nepal, a Hindu religious organization, in Nepalgunj, Banke District. No one was charged with the crime.

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 September 21, 2005, a group of armed Maoists attacked and vandalized Ramchandra Temple in Muga village of Dhankuta District.

In addition to attacking regular schools, Maoists reportedly attacked Christian schools, orphanages, and homes in efforts to forcibly conscript children.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Adherents of the country's many religious groups generally coexisted peacefully and respected all places of worship. Most Hindus respected the many Buddhist shrines located throughout the country; Buddhists accorded Hindu shrines the same respect. Buddha's birthplace was an important pilgrimage site, and his birthday was a national holiday.

In September 2004, an Iraqi militant group killed twelve Nepalese expatriate workers in Iraq. The result was mob violence in Kathmandu and other areas of the country. Mosques and businesses owned by Muslims as well as manpower agencies and press houses were targeted. Seven persons were killed, four by mob violence because they were, or were believed to be, Muslim. Immediately following the riots, the prime minister made a nationwide address calling on citizens to eschew communal violence and maintain religious harmony. A government investigation resulted in no arrests, but the Government compensated affected manpower agencies. Subsequent to the communal rioting, leaders of multiple faiths organized a rally in Kathmandu and called on their followers to maintain religious harmony.

Some Christian groups reported that Hindu extremism has increased in recent years. 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. Government policy does not support Hindu extremism, although some political figures have made public statements critical of Christian missionary activities. 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, sometimes were ostracized socially. They occasionally face 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 at times vehement and occasionally violent. Nevertheless, converts generally were not afraid to admit in public 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 and persistent. Such incidents occurred despite the Government's efforts to protect the rights of disadvantaged castes.

In December 2004, approximately a dozen persons were injured in a scuffle when the management committee of a Hindu temple in Chitwan District tried to stop "low caste" persons from entering the temple.

On October 06, 2005, "upper caste" locals stopped dalit women from using public facilities like shops and rice mills as a punishment for praying at the local Dihibar Temple in Siraha District.

On October 13, 2005, "upper caste" locals in Saptari District imposed a blockade on a dalit hamlet to punish the residents for not playing drums during a local fete. Villagers prevented six dalit families in the area from using the public path and denied them access to rice mills, medical shops, and public water taps.

On December 26, 2005, after a local dalit activist entered a temple in Saptari District, "upper caste" villagers fined him to cover the expenses of performing a ceremony to purify the temple.

On March 14, 2006, after learning he was a dalit, a landlord in Bharatpur District evicted a tenant who had come to the area to take the nationwide school exam and had been staying at the house for fourteen days.

On March 21, 2006, "upper caste" locals barred dalit youths from entering the famous Saileshwori Temple in Dipayal by padlocking the temple door.

SECTION IV. U.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, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and other religious groups. The embassy closely monitored religious freedom and raised the issue with the Government when appropriate. In April 2006, the embassy sponsored a religion

teacher from Tribhuvan University for an international visitor program in the United States entitled "Religious Diversity in America."

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 that "subject to law, public order and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion;" however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. Freedom of speech is constitutionally "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam." The country was created to be a homeland for Muslims, although its founders did not envisage it as an Islamic state.

The Government took some steps to improve the treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report, but serious problems remained. The Government failed to protect the rights of religious minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith fostered religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities.

Due to the 1974 constitutional amendment declaring them non-Muslim, the Ahmadiyya community continued to face legal bars to the practice of its faith. While other minority religious communities generally were able to worship freely, their members faced governmental discrimination. Members of certain Islamic schools of thought also claimed governmental discrimination. While law enforcement personnel allegedly abused religious minorities in custody, there were no reports of deaths while in custody during the reporting period. Security forces and other government agencies did not adequately prevent or address societal abuse against minorities.

Specific government policies that discriminate against religious minorities include the use of the "anti-Ahmadi laws," the blasphemy laws, and the Hudood Ordinances. In 1984, the Government added Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi laws," to the penal code. The section prohibits Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims or posing as Muslims, from referring to their faith as Islam, from preaching or propagating their faith, from inviting others to accept the Ahmadi faith, and from insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The blasphemy laws provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and ten years' imprisonment for insulting the religious feelings of any citizen. These laws are often used to intimidate reform-minded Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities, or to settle personal scores. The Hudood Ordinances impose elements of Qur'anic law on both Muslims and non-Muslims and different legal standards for men and women.

The provincial government in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with the conservative Islamic vision of its supporters. Despite the Hisba Bill's passage by the NWFP Provincial Assembly in 2005, the Supreme Court overturned the bill, declaring it to be unconstitutional.

During the reporting period, the Government maintained its public calls for religious tolerance, worked with moderate religious leaders to organize programs on sectarian harmony and interfaith understanding, maintained its ban on and actively attempted to curb the activities of sectarian and terrorist organizations, implemented a registration scheme for Islamic religious schools known as madrassahs, and proceeded with reform of the public education curriculum designed to end the teaching of religious intolerance. On July 1, 2006, President Musharraf instructed the Council on Islamic Ideology (CII) to prepare a revised Hudood Ordinance that eliminates discriminatory treatment of women and minorities not later than August 2006. In addition, the president ordered the release of all women detained under the current ordinance. According to local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), approximately 700 women had been released by the end of the period covered by this report.

Relations between religious communities were tense. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was widespread and societal violence against such groups occurred. Societal actors, including terrorist and extremist groups and individuals, targeted religious congregations. More than 110 deaths accrued from sectarian violence, including terrorist attacks by Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), during the period covered by this report. Large numbers of victims came from both Sunni and Shi'a sects. The Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), a coalition of Islamist political parties, continued in its political rhetoric to call for the increased Islamization of

the government and society. At the end of the period covered by this report, the MMA led the opposition in the national assembly, held a majority in the NWFP Provincial Assembly, and was part of the ruling coalition in Balochistan.

However, some members of the MMA made efforts to eliminate their rhetoric against Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, and Parsis. Under government pressure, many of its leaders joined various interfaith efforts to promote religious tolerance. Religious leaders, representing the country's six major Shi'a and Sunni groups, issued a religious injunction in May 2005 banning sectarian violence and the killing of non-Muslims. While there was a decline in sectarian violence during the previous reporting period, this reporting period's levels remained unchanged. Sectarian violence and discrimination continued despite contrary calls from the Government, Islamic religious leaders, and some parts of the MMA. Anti-Ahmadi and anti-Semitic rhetoric continued unabated, although rhetoric against Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan was largely abandoned.

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 took a number of steps to improve their treatment. As part of its education reform initiative, the U.S. Government continued to help the Education Ministry revise its curriculum, including eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance. Embassy officials remained engaged with all parties involved in madrassah reform to encourage similar changes. Embassy officials pressed members of parliament and the Government to revise blasphemy laws and the Hudood Ordinances to minimize abuses. The embassy also expanded contacts with all religious groups to promote moderation, end sectarian strife and religiously motivated violence, and support efforts at interfaith dialogue.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 310,527 square miles, and its population was approximately 162 million. Official figures on religious demography—based on the most recent census, taken in 1998—showed that approximately 96 percent of the population or 148.8 million persons were Muslim, 2.02 percent or 2.44 million persons were Hindu, 1.69 percent or 2.09 million were Christian, and 0.35 percent or 539,000 were "other," including Ahmadis.

The majority of Muslims in the country were Sunni. Ten percent or approximately 14.9 million were Shi'a. The Shi'a claimed these figures were inaccurate and that at least 20 percent of the Muslim population were Shi'a followers, split between the Qom (approximately 40 percent) and Najaf (approximately 60 percent) schools of thought. Government estimates on Shi'a counted approximately 750,000 Ismailis, most of whom were spiritual followers of the Aga Khan. An estimated 80 thousand Ismailis belonged to the Bohra or other smaller schools of thought. Shi'as were found nationwide but had population concentrations in Karachi, Gilgit, and parts of Balochistan. Ismailis were found principally in Hunza, Karachi, and Baltistan. The majority Sunni Muslim community was divided into three main schools of thought (Brailvi, Deobandi, and Ahl-e-Hadith) and a socio-political movement, the Jamaat Islami (JI), which had its own theology, schools, and mosques. Ahl-e-Hadith adherents comprised, at most, 5 percent of Muslims, and were concentrated in Punjab. No reliable figures on JI adherents existed, as its membership always claimed adherence to another school. Its adherents, however, were generally found in urban centers. Brailvi and Deobandi leaders both claimed that their schools comprised up to 80 percent of the overall Muslim population. Most disinterested observers believed that the Brailvi remained the largest school, approximately 60 percent of all Muslims, with the Deobandi at approximately 20 percent but growing. The Brailvi were the dominant majority in Sindh and Punjab. Deobandi were generally found in the Pashtun belt from northern Punjab, across the NWFP, and into northern Balochistan, although there were increasing numbers in Karachi and the Seraiki areas of Punjab.

Several smaller self-described Muslim groups existed, most notably approximately 200 thousand Zikris found in Gwadar, Balochistan. Most Sunnis considered Zikris to be non-Muslims due to their unique religious ceremonies, including a separate Hajj held in Turbat, Balochistan. Ahmadis have been officially declared non-Muslim due to their belief that a prophet came after Muhammad to revive the religion. Ahmadis have boycotted the census since 1974, rendering official numbers inaccurate. They claimed at least 2 million adherents centered on their spiritual town of Chenab Nagar, Punjab (referred to as Rabwah by Ahmadis).

Non-Muslims were officially 4 percent of the population, although their leaders claimed the actual figure was approximately 10 percent. Christians, officially num-

bered at 2.09 million, claimed to have 4 million members, 90 percent of whom lived in Punjab. The largest Christian denomination was the umbrella Protestant Church of Pakistan, a member of the Anglican Communion. Roman Catholics were the second-largest group, and the remainder belonged to various evangelical denominations. The Catholic diocese of Karachi estimated that 120 thousand Catholics lived in Karachi, 40 thousand in the rest of Sindh, and 5 thousand in Quetta, Balochistan. A few tribal Hindus of the lower castes from interior Sindh have converted to Christianity. Hindus were officially numbered at 2.44 million adherents, but their leaders claimed an actual membership of approximately 4 million. Most Hindus lived in Sindh, where they comprised approximately 8 percent of the population. Parsis, Sikhs, and Buddhists each had approximately 20 thousand adherents, while the Baha'i claimed 30 thousand. The tiny but influential Parsi community was concentrated in Karachi. Some tribes in Balochistan and 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 not to be affiliated with any religion.

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 also prayed at least once during the five prayer times each day. During the month of Ramadan, even many less observant Muslims fasted and attended services. Approximately 70 percent of English-speaking Catholics worshiped regularly; a much lower percentage of Urdu speakers did so.

Many varieties of Hinduism were practiced. Hindu shrines and temples were scattered throughout the country, although most of them were used as residences. Attendance at religious services was much greater during Hindu festivals, such as Diwali and Holi.

The Sikh community regularly held ceremonial gatherings at sacred places in Punjab. Prominent places of Sikh pilgrimage included Nankana Sahib (where the founder of the Sikh religion, Guru Nanak, was born in 1469), Hasan Abdal (a shrine where an imprint of his hand is kept), and Kartar Poora (also known as Daira Baba Nanak Sahib) in Narowal District (where Guru Nanak died).

Parsis, who practice the Zoroastrian religion, had no regularly scheduled congregational services except during a ten-day religious festival in August called Naurooz ("new day"). All Parsis were expected to attend these services; most reportedly did. During the rest of the year, individuals offered prayers at Parsi temples.

Foreign missionaries operated in the country. The largest Christian mission group engaged in Bible translation for the Church of Pakistan. An Anglican missionary group fielded several missionaries to assist the Church of Pakistan in administrative and educational work. Catholic missionaries, mostly Franciscan, worked with persons with disabilities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. It also states that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to profess and practice their religions freely; however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion, particularly on Ahmadis.

Due to Ahmadis not accepting that Muhammad was the final prophet of Islam, a 1974 constitutional amendment declares this self-described Islamic community to be non-Muslim. In 1984, the Government added Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi laws," to the penal code. The section prohibits Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims or posing as Muslims, referring to their faith as Islam, preaching or propagating their faith, inviting others to accept the Ahmadi faith, and insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The constitutionality of Section 298(c) was upheld in a split-decision supreme court case in 1996. The punishment for violation of the section is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine. The Government has blocked similar movements to restrict both Zikris and Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan. Other religious communities were generally free to observe their religious obligations; however, religious minorities are, in some places, legally restricted from public display of certain religious images and, due to discriminatory legislation, are often afraid to profess their religion freely.

Freedom of speech is subject to "reasonable" restrictions in the interests of the "glory of Islam." The consequences for contravening the country's "blasphemy laws," are the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and ten years' imprisonment for insulting

another's religious feelings. To end the filing of frivolous charges, the Government enacted a law in January 2005 that requires senior police officials to investigate any blasphemy charges before a complaint is filed. 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.

The Hudood Ordinances criminalize rape, extramarital sex, property crimes, alcohol, and gambling. They apply equally to Muslims and non-Muslims. Hudood violations can be tried on either Qur'anic or secular standards of evidence. If Qur'anic standards are used, Muslim and non-Muslim and male and female testimony carries different weight, and harsh Qur'anic punishments can be applied. No successful cases have been brought under this standard. Cases have been successfully prosecuted under secular standards, in which testimony has equal weight, and jail terms and fines have been applied. In January 2005, the Government adopted new legislation requiring a court order prior to detention of women on Hudood charges. Approximately 246 women were imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinances as of the end of the reporting period. On July 1, 2006, President Musharraf instructed the CII to prepare a revised Hudood Ordinance that would eliminate discriminatory provisions against women and minorities not later than August 2006. President Musharraf ordered the release of all women imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinances at the end of the reporting period.

Under the Anti-Terrorist Act, any action, including speech, intended to stir up religious hatred is punishable by up to seven years of rigorous imprisonment. Under the act, bail is not to be granted if the judge has reasonable grounds to believe that the accused is guilty; however, the law is applied selectively.

Pressure from societal, religious, or political leaders routinely prevented courts from protecting minority rights. These same pressures forced justices to take strong action against any perceived offense to Sunni Islamic orthodoxy. Discrimination against religious minorities was rarely placed before the judiciary. Courts would be unlikely to act objectively in such cases. Resolving cases is very slow; there is generally a long period between filing the case and the first court appearance. Lower courts are frequently intimidated and therefore, delay decisions, and refuse bail for fear of reprisal from extremist elements. Bail in blasphemy cases is almost always denied by original trial courts on the logic that since defendants are facing the death penalty, they are likely to flee. Defendants can appeal the denial of bail (and many do), but bail is often times not granted by the high court or the supreme court in advance of the trial.

The country's penal code ostensibly incorporates a number of Islamic law (Shari'a) provisions, applying to all, Muslims and non-Muslims, that allow victims to carry out physical retribution. 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, and judges and attorneys in these courts must be Muslims. The federal Shari'a court also may overturn any legislation judged to be inconsistent with the tenets of Islam; however, in March 2005, 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 Shariat court should have had initial appellate jurisdiction, marking a blow to the power of the Shariat appellate benches.

The Government designates religion on passports and national identity documents. In November 2004 the Government began issuing new machine-readable passports without the religion column. A conservative backlash and Islamist party protests led the Government to reverse course and restore the column in March 2005. Those wishing to be listed as a Muslim on such documents had to swear a belief in the finality of the prophethood and denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslims.

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.

State funding was provided for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain religious properties belonging to minority communities that were abandoned during partition. Minority communities claimed the Government did not spend adequate funds on their protection and upkeep. The Government collected a 2.5 percent

tax on all Sunni Muslims, which was distributed to Sunni mosques and charities. No similar service was provided for other religious groups.

The Government nationalized all church schools and colleges in Punjab and Sindh in 1972. The Government of Sindh oversaw a piecemeal denationalization program from 1985 to 1995, and the Government of Punjab began a similar program in 1996. In 2001 the federal Government and the courts ordered the provincial governments to move forward with a complete denationalization process. Teachers' unions strongly objected, fearing for their job security, and have attempted to tie up denationalization in the court system. The 2003 denationalization of Forman Christian College, arguably the most prominent Christian-founded educational institution in the country, and its successful December 2003 handover to its original owners, the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), helped remove the legal hurdles. On May 9 and 10, 2005, the Sindh Government handed over St. Patrick's and St. Joseph's colleges to the Catholic Board of Education. The cases of Gordon College in Rawalpindi and Murray College in Sialkot (both PCUSA) remained unresolved.

Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority 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."

Sunni Muslims appeared to receive favorable consideration in government hiring and advancement. In addition, all those wishing to obtain government identification documents as Muslims had to declare an oath on belief in the finality of the prophethood, 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.

Several Muslim religious holidays were considered national holidays, including Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Azha, Ashura (the ninth and tenth days of the month of Muharram) and the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Most businesses had limited hours during the month of Ramadan. Non-Muslim holidays were not observed, although Mohammad Ali Jinnah's birthday was celebrated as a holiday on Christmas Day.

The constitution safeguards "educational institutions with respect to religion." No student can be forced to receive religious instruction or to participate in religious worship other than his or her own. The denial of religious instruction for students of any religious community or denomination is also prohibited.

"Islamiyyat" (Islamic studies) was compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other faiths legally were not required to study Islam, they were not provided with parallel studies in their own religions. In some schools, non-Muslim students could study "Akhlaqiyyat," or Ethics. In practice, teachers induced many non-Muslim students to complete Islamic studies.

The constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution solely on the basis of religion. Government officials 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 in the unqualified finality of the prophethood of Muhammad, a measure designed to single out Ahmadis. Non-Muslims must have their religion verified by the head of their local religious community.

Parents were free to send children to religious schools, at their expense, and many did.

Private schools were free to teach or not teach religion as they choose. Many private schools run by minority religious groups catered to students from both the Islamic and non-Islamic communities and therefore chose to teach Islamic studies as well as studies in a minority religion.

Islamic private schools known as madrassahs came to the forefront after September 11, 2001, due to their perceived use as training and recruiting grounds for extremist and terrorist organizations. Subsequent studies showed that only a small fraction of schools fell into this category. In accordance with the 2002 Madrassah Registration Ordinance, all madrassahs were required to register with the Government or with one of the five independent madrassah boards (wafaqs), cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their government. In July 2005, President Musharraf announced a deadline of December 31, 2005, for the expulsion of all foreign students from madrassahs and their direct reg-

istration with the Government. According to the Interior Ministry, 95 percent of foreign students had departed by the deadline, some following deportation proceedings organized by the ministry and registration of all schools remained in progress. According to the Religious Affairs Ministry, approximately 11 thousand out of an estimated 13 thousand to 15 thousand madrassahs had registered by the end of April 2006. No unregistered madrassahs were shut down at the end of the period covered by this report. In December 2005, President Musharraf issued a second amendment to the Societies Registration Act following negotiations between the Government and the five wafaqs. This amendment laid out the framework for cooperative registration of madrassahs with the Government, including provision of financial and educational data to the Government, and prohibited the teaching of sectarian or religious hatred and violence. The Government and the independent madrassah boards agreed to a phased introduction of modern subjects, including math, English, and science at all madrassahs. While the boards have required their affiliated madrassahs to move forward, disbursement of promised government funding to support the process has been slow. The wafaqs that oversaw most of the country's madrassahs had already agreed with the Government to undertake substantial reforms. All wafaqs mandated the elimination of teaching that promoted religious or sectarian intolerance and terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs. They appointed inspectors to ensure compliance. All inspectors mandated that affiliated madrassahs supplement religious studies with modern subjects, including English, math, and science. Phased-in approaches were underway at each wafaq's members. Bureaucratic delay continued to stymie release of government funds for this purpose. Wafaqs also restricted foreign private funding of madrassahs. Examination concerns remained under active discussion with the Government. Some unregistered and Deobandi-controlled madrassahs in the FATA and northern Balochistan continued to teach extremism. Similarly, the Dawa schools run by Jamat-ud-Dawa continued such teaching and recruitment for Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization.

The MMA-led provincial government in NWFP continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with the conservative Islamic vision of its supporters. If implemented, many of these initiatives would impose Islamic law on all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation. Existing laws include: Antiobscenity measures, under which advertising has been torn down and stores have been fined for selling certain western recordings; a complete ban on alcohol; a requirement for civil servants to pray five times daily, which has never been enforced; bans on public displays of women's photos and dancing, also not enforced; and a Shari'a bill that mirrored one already in place at the federal level since 1991 which requires that all existing legislation, including in the education and financial sectors, be reviewed in light of Shari'a. On August 31, 2005, the supreme court declared unconstitutional large sections of a second MMA-sponsored provincial Hisba bill, under which a provincial authority is appointed and empowered to create, implement and enforce regulations to promote Islamic laws and values, and prohibited its implementation.

The Government, at its most senior levels, continued to call for interfaith dialogue and sectarian harmony as part of its program to promote enlightened moderation. It was instrumental in organizing the inaugural meeting of the World Council of Religions, an interfaith body of clerics and religious scholars devoted to interfaith dialogue. Clergy from all Islamic schools of thought and minority faith communities, with the exception of the Ahmadis, who were not invited, joined the council. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the Council on Islamic Ideology, a constitutionally mandated government body, continued to sponsor interfaith and inter-sectarian workshops and meetings. The Religious Affairs Ministry played an active role in negotiating the inter-sectarian injunction against sectarian violence and the killing of non-Muslims in the country issued in May 2005. The primary responsibility of the Religious Affairs Ministry is to organize participation in the Hajj and other Muslim religious pilgrimages and to distribute the zakaat (the religious tax on Sunni Muslims).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government discouraged and severely restricted public practice of the Ahmadiyya faith both by law and in practice. The 1974 constitutional amendment and 1984 changes to the Penal Code Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi laws," were used by the Government and anti-Ahmadi religious groups to target and harass Ahmadis. The vague wording of the provision that forbids Ahmadis from "directly or indirectly" posing as Muslims enabled mainstream Muslim religious leaders to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting form and for naming their children Muhammad. An Ahmadiyya Muslim community report claimed that during the period covered by this report,

twenty-six Ahmadis faced criminal charges under religious laws or because of their faith: Four under the blasphemy laws, seventeen under Ahmadi-specific laws, and four under other laws but motivated by their Ahmadi faith. At the end of April 2006, five Ahmadis were in prison on blasphemy charges and three were in prison on murder charges that the Ahmadiyya community claimed were falsely brought due to their religious beliefs.

The Government gave tacit endorsement to Islamic clerics' campaigns against the perceived dangers of the Ahmadiyya faith by permitting the annual conference on the finality of the prophethood. Ahmadis were prohibited from holding any public conferences or gatherings, and since 1983 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. Since July 2003, anyone wanting to travel on the Hajj must denounce the founder of the Ahmadiyya faith as a "cunning person and an imposter" on a printed oath that is part of the government registration process, thereby effectively preventing Ahmadis from fulfilling this tenant of the Islamic faith. Additionally, Ahmadi publications were banned from public sale; however, Ahmadis 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, the authorities continued to conduct surveillance on the Ahmadis and their institutions. Several Ahmadi mosques reportedly have been closed; others reportedly have been desecrated or had their construction stopped. For example, on June 18, 2005, police ordered the Ahmadiyya community in Pindi, Bhatian, Hafizabad, Punjab to stop construction on a mosque on a site acquired for the purpose some twenty years previously. Police were reportedly acting on the request of the local Islamic cleric.

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 was no law against apostasy; however, societal pressure against conversion from Islam was so strong that any conversion almost certainly would take place in secret.

There are no legal requirements for an individual to practice or affiliate nominally with a religion. The Government did not penalize or legally discriminate against those not affiliated with any religion. In practice, societal pressure was such that very few persons would admit to not belonging to a religious group since doing so would likely lead to significant discrimination.

Religious belief or specific adherence to a religion was not required for membership in the ruling party or the moderate opposition parties, which did not exclude members of any religion. The MMA had non-Muslim members of parliament; however, in practice, each of its constituent parties generally restricted membership to its sectarian adherents. It would be virtually impossible for Ahmadis or Jews to join the MMA or its constituent parties. In practice, neither Ismailis nor Zikris could join the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazlur Rehman, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Sami ul-Haq, or JI. Shi'a claimed they were not welcome in JI, although JI leadership denied the assertion. The political arm of the sectarian extremist group Sunni Tehrik accepted only Brailvi members.

The Government 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. Deobandi and Ahl-e-Hadith leaders claimed the Government harassed their members due to political stances. Brailvis and Ahl-e-Hadiths claimed the Government, hoping to appease political extremists, favored the Deobandis and JI for jobs in state mosques, Islamic studies faculties at state schools, and government jobs with religious responsibilities. The Government denied such charges.

Missionaries were allowed to operate in the country, and proselytizing, except by Ahmadis, was permitted as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge that they are not Muslim; however, all missionaries were required to have specific visas, valid from two to five years and allowing only one entry into the country per year. Only "replacement" visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems were frequent.

The constitution allows "reasonable" restrictions on freedom of speech for the "glory of Islam." The penal code includes specific provisions that restrict speech and action against other religions. These "blasphemy laws," as they are collectively

known, were often used to harass and intimidate reform-minded Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities. They were also used to settle personal scores and business rivalries. While no accused persons have been executed under this law, the accused often spend years in prison. Blasphemy suspects were not routinely granted bail and were often convicted by trial courts following threats to judges by extremists. In contrast to previous reporting periods, there was no record of deaths by inmates or security forces within prison. At the end of the reporting period, twenty-two remained in detention awaiting trial on blasphemy charges, and nine were in prison following conviction.

In 2005, the Government enacted a law that requires senior police officials to investigate any blasphemy charges before a complaint is filed. Human rights organizations had called for such changes since 2000. Initial indications on the law's impact were positive. There were only twenty-four blasphemy cases filed during the reporting period, a decline from fifty-four during the previous years' reporting period. According to figures compiled by local NGOs, between 1986 and April 2006, 695 persons were accused of blasphemy: 362 Muslims, 239 Ahmadis, 86 Christians, and 10 Hindus. In many cases filed during the year, the accused were either released on bail or charges were dropped. Of the 695 individuals accused of blasphemy at the end of the reporting period, 22 remained in detention awaiting trial on blasphemy charges, and 9 were in prison following conviction.

The Government does not restrict religious publishing in general; however, Ahmadi religious literature is banned. Publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets or insults to another's religion is prohibited. Insults against minority religious groups were rarely prosecuted. For example, the weekly newspaper Ghazwa published in Azad Jammu Kashmir with the financial support of the terrorist organization Jamaat-ud-Dawa was not prosecuted for publishing offensive, insulting, and inaccurate articles about earthquake relief efforts undertaken by NGOs linked to the Ahmadiyya community. Christian scriptures and books are readily available, but Christians have reported concerns about pressure leading to self-censorship. While most Christian books are imported, there are Christian publishing houses operating within the country. Ahmadis charge that they suffer from restrictions on their press. For example, on August 7, 2005, the Punjab provincial government ordered two Ahmadi printing presses in Jhang, Punjab, shut down. Police took the editor of the Ahmaddiya community magazine al-Fazl, Sami Khan, into protective custody and later released him. The move followed complaints from a local Islamic leader that the publications insulted the religious sentiments of Muslims. The provincial home department ultimately gave permission for the presses to reopen.

In July 2003, Tanvir Ahmed Asif and Abdul Qadir were charged with blasphemy, as well as violating the anti-Ahmadi law, for writing a book which explained the situation of Ahmadis around the country. In November 2004, the Peshawar High Court overturned the blasphemy conviction of former Frontier Post copy editor Munawar Mohsin. Mohsin had published a letter to the editor in 2001 that was critical of Muhammad. There have been no new developments in this case.

Publication of the Qur'an must include the original Arabic text. In May 2005, the Government confiscated Urdu translations of the Qur'an published in Canada that did not include the original Arabic.

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. In November 2004, an Islamabad magistrate ordered the destruction of an issue of Newsweek containing objectionable photos alongside an article on the killing of Theo Van Gogh.

Many local and 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.

The Government funded and facilitated Hajj travel but had no similar program for pilgrimages by religious minorities. In addition to prohibiting Ahmadi travel for the Hajj, the Government de facto prevented Baha'is from traveling to their spiritual center in Israel due to nonrecognition of that country.

The Government designates religion on passports and national identity documents. Those wishing to be listed as a Muslim on such documents had to swear a belief in the finality of the prophethood and denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslims, resulting in further discrimination and harassment against the community.

Links with coreligionists in other countries were maintained relatively easily. The Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan reported no difficulties. Ismailis communicated regularly with their headquarters; their officials, including Prince Karim Aga Khan, visited the country. Under reciprocal visa arrangements, Indian Hindu and Sikh leaders and groups traveled frequently to the country.

The constitution requires that the country's president and prime minister must be Muslims. All senior officials, including 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. In NWFP, provincial regulations require all civil servants to pray five times daily; however, this was not enforced.

Sunni Muslims appeared to receive favorable consideration in government hiring and advancement. Religious minorities, including Shi'a, contended that the Government persistently discriminated against members of their communities in hiring for the civil service and in admissions to government institutions of higher learning. Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadis, who 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.

Religious minorities claimed the Government failed to provide their areas with equal public services and criticized the Religious Affairs Ministry for failing to take adequate steps to improve their socioeconomic development. The ministry rejected these charges, claiming it spent 30 percent of its annual budget on minorities.

Ahl-e-Hadith and Brailvi leaders contended that their groups were underrepresented in the hiring of clergy for government mosques and on the Islamic faculties of government colleges. They charged that members of JI dominated both the Religious Affairs Ministry and the Islamiyyat wing of the Education Ministry. Ahl-e-Hadith complained of under-representation on government-sponsored religious boards such as the Zakat and Ush'r Council.

Ahmadis continued to contend that they were denied voting rights through requirements that they register as non-Muslims. Members of the public can challenge any Muslim on the voter rolls to take an oath swearing to the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad and denouncing the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement. For this reason, Ahmadis refused to register. 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, if ever, rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to politically sensitive positions. A chaplaincy corps provided services for Muslim soldiers, but no similar services were available for religious minorities.

The public school curriculum was Islamized during the 1980s. This included the adoption of a number of textbooks that included derogatory remarks against minority religious groups, particularly Hindus and Jews, and the generalized teaching of religious intolerance as acceptable. The curriculum continued to undergo a major revision to eliminate such teachings and to remove Islamic teaching from secular subjects. The Education Ministry cooperated with international donors and NGOs in this multiyear effort and professed its intention to proceed despite objections from conservative religious elements. Students were free to practice their faith. Many Ahmadis and Christians reported discrimination in applying to government educational institutions due to their religious affiliation. Christians and Ahmadis reportedly have been denied access to medical schools, and societal discrimination against Ahmadis persisted at many universities.

All religious groups experienced bureaucratic delays and requests for bribes when attempting to build houses of worship or to obtain land. These were similar to what nonreligious groups faced. Ahmadis were prevented from building houses of worship. Sunni Muslim groups built mosques and shrines without government permission and at times in violation of zoning ordinances.

The provincial and federal governments had legal responsibility for the upkeep of religious property abandoned during partition. Disputes with minority communities over the property and its upkeep may be reviewed by civil courts. While the Government funded the upkeep and repair of some properties, minority communities continued to charge that its efforts in many cases were inadequate.

Criminal law allows offenders to offer monetary restitution to victims and allows victims to carry out physical retribution rather than seek punishment through the court system. This supposedly Islamic provision applied to all. Minorities claimed that minority offenders faced far higher, and minority victims received far lower, amounts of monetary restitution than did Muslims.

Also supposedly based on Islamic law, a fact much in dispute, the Hudood Ordinances were used to discriminate against women. Women were often spuriously charged with extramarital sex under this law and forced to remain in detention for long periods awaiting trial. To address this issue, the Government adopted new leg-

islation in January 2005, requiring a court order prior to detention of women on such Hudood charges. Human rights activists charged that this change was insufficient and continued to campaign for the repeal of the Hudood Ordinances. On July 1, 2006, President Musharraf instructed the CII to prepare a revised Hudood Ordinance to eliminate such discriminatory provisions against women not later than August. In addition, he ordered the release of all women detained under the current ordinance.

Civil marriages do not exist; marriages are performed and registered according to one's religion. The marriages of Hindu or Christian men remain legal upon conversion to Islam but are considered dissolved for marriages of Hindu or Christian women or of other non-Muslims that were performed under the rites of the previous religion. Children born to Hindu or Christian women who do not separate from their husbands, yet convert to Islam after marriage, are considered illegitimate unless their husbands also convert. Children of non-Muslim men who convert are not considered illegitimate. Under Islamic law, a Muslim man can marry a woman of the Book (Jews or Christians) but cannot marry a Hindu woman. Muslim women may only marry Muslim men. There is no law concerning the children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who convert to another religion, nor is there a law dealing with a Muslim woman whose husband converts to a minority religion.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Police torture and mistreatment of those in custody remained a serious and common problem throughout the country and at times resulted in extrajudicial killings. It was usually impossible to ascertain whether religion was a factor in cases in which religious minorities were victims; however, both Christian and Ahmadi communities claimed their members were more likely to be abused. Prison conditions, except those for wealthy or influential prisoners, were extremely poor. Non-Muslim prisoners generally were accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates. There were no reports of police or inmates killing those accused of blasphemy in custody during the reporting period.

The policeman charged in the May 2004 death-in-custody of Samuel Masih, a Christian, remained in detention pending trial. Charges were pending against two officers charged in the July 26, 2004, torture of Manu Kholi, a Hindu.

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.

Human rights groups charged that police in Nowshera severely mistreated Christian Yousaf Masih following his June 28, 2005, detention on spurious blasphemy charges. They contended that ongoing mistreatment in prison led to a severe deterioration in his health. Police released Masih on August 8, 2005, and charges against him were dropped.

On April 7, 2006, two prison staff at the central jail in Sahiwal, Punjab, joined Muslim inmates in attacking four Christian prisoners who had gathered for prayer and Bible study. Prison staff stripped the Christians of their clothing and physically tortured them. The four were then locked up in solitary confinement. No action was taken against the prison officials.

The Government was not responsible for disappearances based on a person's religion; however, police did not always effectively respond to complaints of disappearances of members of minority religious groups. Police made no arrests in the November 2004 kidnapping and killing of eight-year-old Samuel Sethi, a Christian, and in the February 2005 kidnapping of thirteen-year-old Fozia Zafar, also a Christian, who remained missing at the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of security forces engaging in rape or mutilation based on religion.

Minority religious groups continued to complain of police inaction in cases of attacks by extremists against congregants and property belonging to minorities.

On November 4, 2005, after a dispute between Christians and Muslims in the village of Niale da Wara in the District of Sheikhupura, in Manawala, thirteen armed men attacked Pastor Indrias Masih, beating him severely. Women and children were also reportedly attacked. The police made no arrests in this case during the period covered by this report.

On the evening and night of November 12, 2005, a mob of approximately 2,500, urged on by local clergy, attacked and destroyed Christian churches, religious properties, and houses in the town of Sangla Hill. According to witnesses, police took no action to control or disperse the mob or to protect Christian property.

The blasphemy laws were routinely used to harass religious minorities and reform-minded Muslims and to settle personal scores or business rivalries. Individuals were detained and convicted on spurious charges. Judges and magistrates, seeking

to avoid a confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continued trials indefinitely. As a result, those accused of blasphemy often faced lengthy periods in jail and were burdened with increased legal costs and repeated court appearances, before acquittal, generally at the appellate level. At the end of the reporting period, twenty-two remained in detention awaiting trial on blasphemy charges, and nine were in prison following conviction.

There were no developments during the reporting period in the case of Ranjha Masih, who continued to serve a life sentence on blasphemy charges.

In July 2004, a Christian girl was accused of throwing a copy of the Qur'an into a local dump. A Muslim mob threatened to burn down the family residence and tried to kill the girl. Local elders and police intervened and arrested the girl and her father. They were eventually released and the family moved to ensure their safety.

In October 2004, blasphemy charges were filed against Mohammad Ali, a Muslim and owner of a paper mill, for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an. Police dismissed the charges.

In November 2004, Muhammad Iqbal, an Ahmadi, received a life sentence following his conviction on blasphemy charges for allegedly referring to Muhammad as a false prophet. His appeal was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In December 2004, blasphemy charges were filed against Shahdat Ali, an Ahmadi, and his two alleged accomplices for allegedly setting fire to the Qur'an. Police dismissed the charges without trial.

In December 2004, Anwar Masih, a Christian, was acquitted of blasphemy charges. Upon his release, members of Lashkar-i-Mujahideen vowed to kill him. Masih remained in hiding at the end of the period covered by this report.

In April 2005, Ashiq Nabi was killed by a mob of approximately 400 individuals after an Islamic religious leader issued an edict declaring Nabi an infidel whose punishment for allegedly desecrating a copy of the Qur'an should be death. Police did not make any arrests in this case.

On June 29, 2005, police in Nowshera, NWFP, arrested illiterate Christian janitor Yousaf Masih on blasphemy charges. Witnesses claimed Masih had burned pages of the Qur'an while disposing of trash for his employer. Following his arrest, a mob of between 300 and 500 protesters destroyed a Hindu temple and houses belonging to Christian and Hindu families in the city. While police arrested some perpetrators after the fact, under the terms of a deal negotiated between Islamic religious leaders and the Hindu/Christian communities, police released all of them without charge. Police released Masih from custody on bail on August 6, 2005, and dropped charges against him. Human rights groups claimed that he and his family were in hiding for fear of Islamic extremist groups that threatened to kill him.

On September 2, 2005, in Gandalf, Swabi, NWFP, police arrested a Hindu couple, Chaman Lal and his wife Krishna Wanti, on charges of defiling the Qur'an. Locals alleged that they had seen the couple throw a Qur'an into a field near their home. Lal had converted to Islam seven years previously but readopted Hinduism at his wife's insistence. The Peshawar High Court granted bail to Lal after he converted to Islam in the presence of the chief justice. The Mardan Anti-Terrorism Court, on December 12, 2005, granted bail to Wanti after she made a similar conversion. The presiding Anti-Terrorism Court judge faced judicial reprimand from the supreme court for granting the bail under these conditions when Wanti had a bail petition pending with the supreme court.

On September 9, 2005, in Lahore, Younis Masih, a Christian, confronted a local Islamic cleric about loud music accompanying a night time religious ceremony. During the course of their altercation, Masih allegedly insulted Muhammad. The clerics' supporters reportedly severely beat Masih before leaving him unconscious at his residence. The next morning, police arrested Masih on charges of blasphemy. In response to the blasphemy allegations, a mob of approximately 200 Muslims attacked the Christian community where Masih resided, damaging houses and a local church. Masih remained in detention, facing blasphemy charges at the end of the reporting period.

On November 11, 2005, in Sangla Hill, Nankana Sahib, Punjab, Yousaf Masih, a Christian, fought with a local Muslim over a gambling debt. In the course of the altercation, the Muslim accused Masih of setting fire to a warehouse containing copies of verses from the Qur'an. Masih departed the scene; however, the following day, the local Muslim demanded that police charge Masih with blasphemy in violation of established procedures. Local Islamic clerics began issuing announcements over their loudspeakers that a Christian had defiled the Qur'an and calling for retribution. In response, a mob of approximately 2,500 formed and attacked Christian areas of the town, forcing local residents to flee and burning 3 churches, 2 parish

houses, a convent, a Christian high school, and the houses of 3 Christian families. Police reportedly took no action to disperse or subdue the mob. Islamic religious leaders issued death threats against local Christians should they return. Police ultimately arrested eighty-eight protesters on charges of destruction of property and Masih on charges of blasphemy. As part of an understanding that local officials negotiated, Christians were allowed to return, and those accused of the violence were released. On February 12, 2006, courts dropped all charges against Masih for lack of evidence.

On April 11, 2006, an appellate court acquitted Christian school teacher Pervez Masih of blasphemy charges and released him after five years in detention.

In addition to experiencing prosecution under the blasphemy laws, Ahmadis were often charged, detained, and convicted under the so-called anti-Ahmadi laws. According to Ahmadiyya publications, police charged seventeen Ahmadis under these laws during the year. All were released by the end of the reporting period. Ahmadi leaders also claimed that the Government used regular sections of the penal code against their members for religious reasons. They claimed three Ahmadis were in detention on such charges at the end of the reporting period. The three had been convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Their cases were under appeal at the end of the period covered by this report.

In July 2004, a Muslim mob attacked Ghulam Ahmad Tahir, an Ahmadi youth, following an anti-Ahmadi conference. Tahir was charged with assault and was later released. In August 2004, Muhammad Ehsan, a mentally ill Ahmadi, was charged with possession of Ahmadi literature and climbing the roof of a mosque. Ehsan was later released. In November 2004, Zulfiqar Goraya, an Ahmadi, was charged under the anti-Ahmadi law for posing as a Muslim by distributing wedding cards containing a common Islamic greeting printed on them. Goraya was also released.

On September 9, 2005, a local rickshaw driver in Faisalabad, Punjab, parked his vehicle in front of the home of the head of the local Ahmadiyya community. The vehicle was painted with insulting, anti-Ahmadi slogans. The two sons of the local community head confronted the rickshaw driver and told him to move his vehicle. The rickshaw driver physically attacked the two Ahmadis. Police intervened and charged the driver and the two Ahmadis with assault. Charges were pending at the end of the reporting period, but the Ahmadis were released on bail.

On October 12, 2005, in Mianwali, Punjab, police and postal officials jointly charged Irfan Ahmad, an Ahmadi subscriber to the community magazine Khalid, with receiving a banned publication. The community magazine is not, in fact, banned, although certain editions have been. Ahmad was released on bail pending trial.

According to media reports and local Ahmadi leaders, on June 23, 2006, in Mirpur Khas, Sindh, at the instigation of two mullahs, police registered a criminal case against five Ahmadis following a complaint by an individual that the accused had tried to convert him. Two of the accused, Maula Bakhsh and Muhammad Akbar, who were fresh converts, were arrested by police. The other three went into hiding and applied for bail before arrest. At a court hearing, Baksh and Akbar admitted that they had converted but denied that they had tried to convert the complainant, claiming that they had merely defended their own beliefs in a conversation on religious matters. The magistrate rejected the request for bail by Baksh and Akbar, an action local Ahmadis attributed to immense social pressure generated by the case; this decision was under review by the district court at the end of the period covered by this report. The other three accused applied for bail in the higher sessions court, which granted the plea. A hearing on their case was scheduled for September 5, 2006.

According to media reports, on June 24, 2006, a mob attacked an Ahmadi locality in Jhando Sahi Village in Daska near Sialkot and injured two persons following allegations that some Ahmadis had desecrated the Qur'an. The mob also set fire to a few vehicles, two shops, and a few houses belonging to Ahmadis. The district police arrived at the scene and arrested seven Ahmadis. They also removed approximately seventy-five Ahmadis from the village for fear of more attacks. Four Ahmadis were booked under section 295C of the penal code for Qur'an desecration, and two were arrested and held in the Sialkot District jail. Later, hundreds of persons belonging to surrounding villages demonstrated against the alleged desecration and chanted anti-Ahmadi slogans and damaged an Ahmadiyya house of worship. The situation in the village remained tense and a large contingent of police was deployed to avert any more damage. Members of the Ahmadi community claim that the men were burning their own journals and papers.

The Government did not impose onerous financial penalties due to religion.

The Government did not abuse converts to minority religious groups. Converts to the Ahmadiyya community were often accused of blasphemy, violations of the anti-

Ahmadi laws, or other crimes. The Government arrested and prosecuted such individuals. Conversion to other minority religious groups generally took place in secret to avoid a societal backlash.

Conservative Islamists (generally Deobandis or JI) claimed the Government unjustly searched their homes, schools, and mosques as part of its continued crackdown on extremist and terrorist groups. The Government denied such allegations, noting the complainants all had previous ties to banned groups, making them reasonable targets.

Minority communities charged the Government was complicit in seizures of their property by Muslims and that the government policy of dismantling illegal slum settlements disproportionately targeted minority communities. These groups also accused the Government of inaction in cases of attacks by extremist groups on places of worship belonging to minority groups.

In July 2004, local government officials in the Bahawalpur District allotted land occupied by twenty-six Hindu families to local Muslims. The Hindu families were evicted from the land.

Following July 2004 protests, police in Chenab Nagar (Rabwah) continued to retain property of the local Ahmaddiya community on which a makeshift mosque had once existed.

On November 29, 2005, Catholic Bishop Anthony Lobo of Islamabad-Rawalpindi alleged that the Government evicted approximately forty Christian families of approximately 200 persons from their homes in Joharabad, Sindh. The Government was giving these families' homes to victims from the October 8, 2005, earthquake.

The Government did not subject individuals to forced labor or enslavement based on religious beliefs; however, minority community leaders charged that the Government failed to take adequate action to prevent bonded labor in both the brick-making and agricultural sectors. Christians and Hindus were disproportionately victims of this practice. In June 2005, police raided sites in Sheikhupura district, Punjab Province, and freed more than 300 mostly Christian workers performing forced labor in brick kilns.

Islamists charged without proof that government forces damaged mosques and religious schools during military operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The Government vigorously denied the allegations.

Forced Religious Conversion

Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. Religious minorities claimed that government actions to stem the problem were inadequate. Several human rights groups have highlighted the increased phenomenon of Hindu girls, particularly in Karachi, being kidnapped from their families and forced to convert to Islam.

Kidnapping charges were pending against a Muslim man who abducted a fifteen-year-old Christian, Samina Izhaq, and forced her to convert in August 2004.

On September 2, 2005, Ghulam Abbas and Mohammad Kashif reportedly drugged and kidnapped Riqba Masih, a Christian woman, from the village of Chak, Punjab, and took her to Lahore. The kidnappers repeatedly raped Masih and threatened to kill her and her family if she did not convert to Islam but Masih refused. On September 3, 2005, another unidentified accomplice took Masih into custody and detained her until September 6, 2005, raping her repeatedly. Later that day, the kidnappers took Masih to Faisalabad and abandoned her at a bus stop from where she made her way to her parents' home. Police arrested Ghulam Abbas and Mohammad Kashif and charged them with kidnapping and rape. Following an October 24, 2005, hearing in which a Faisalabad court denied bail, Kashif escaped from the courtroom and remained at large at the end of the reporting period. Abbas remained in police custody, and police are attempting to find Kashif.

On October 18, 2005, Sanno Amra and Champa, a Hindu couple residing in the Punjab Colony, Karachi, Sindh returned home to find that their three teenage daughters had disappeared. After inquiries to the local police, the couple discovered that their daughters had been taken to a local madrassah, had been converted to Islam, and were denied unsupervised contact with their parents.

On February 16, 2006, six unknown assailants attacked well-known Christian singer A. Nayyar in Lahore. After beating and robbing him, they forced him to recite the prayer for conversion to Islam.

On March 3, 2006, a trial court convicted Maulvi Ghulam Rasool and Mohammed Tayyab on torture and murder charges, stemming from the 2004 abduction, torture, and death of student Javed Anjum, and sentenced them to twenty-five years in prison. Maulvi Rasool kidnapped Anjum and held, tortured, and killed him at his religious school in an attempt to convert him to Islam.

There were no reports of forced conversion of minor United States citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States. However, there were reports of the refusal to allow such citizens to return to the United States.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

There were several incidents involving the abuse of specific religious groups carried out by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations by the Secretary of State under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and by armed sectarian extremist groups with strong links to such organizations.

Nationwide, the sectarian violence situation remained unchanged over the period covered by this report, except for notable improvements occurring in the Federally Administered Northern Areas.

Targeted assassinations of clergy remained a key tactic of several groups including, the sectarian organization Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP), banned under the law, 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'as and Brailvis, whereas ST and SMP targeted Deobandis.

In October 2004 unknown gunmen in Karachi killed Deobandi Mufti Jameel Ahmed Khan and an associate in their vehicle. The assassination might have been linked to a Deobandi-versus-Shi'a cycle of violence playing out at the same time in Punjab.

On January 8, 2005, Deobandi extremists shot and killed Shi'a cleric Agha Ziauddin Rizvi in Gilgit, Federally Administered Northern Areas, leading to demonstrations in which Shi'a and Sunni sectarian opponents assaulted each other and Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan. SSP and SMP moved into the area following the demonstrations.

On May 30, 2005, unknown assailants kidnapped, severely tortured, and killed JI senior official Aslam Mujahid in Karachi. The motives were unknown, but the killing appeared to be linked to political violence.

On July 9, 2005, unidentified men believed to be linked with ST abducted, shot, and killed Deobandi cleric Maulana Shamsuddin in the Orangi Town area of Karachi, Sindh.

On July 17, 2005, unidentified, motorcycle-riding gunmen, believed to be linked to SMP, ambushed the vehicle of Deobandi cleric Mufti Muhammad Ahmed Madni in Karachi. Mufti Madni was seriously injured and his son Maulana Abdulla Ahmed Madni was killed.

On December 2, 2005, unidentified motorcycle-riding gunmen shot and killed Shi'a cleric Allama Badar-ud-Din in Dera Murad Jamali, Balochistan. LT claimed responsibility for the attack.

On April 18, 2006, unidentified motor-cycle riding gunmen, believed to be linked to SSP, ambushed the vehicle of Shi'a cleric Fazl Hussain Alvi and his driver in Faisalabad, Punjab. The assailants' gunfire caused the vehicle's tank to explode, killing both occupants.

Both LJ and SSP also continued attacks on houses of worship and religious gatherings during the period covered by this report.

In October 2004, a cycle of sectarian violence in the Punjab, which had not seen any for several years, broke out. LJ and SM attacked Shi'a and Deobandi places of worship, respectively, killing many and injuring hundreds.

On May 30 2005, a Shi'a mosque in Karachi was attacked; five persons were killed and at least thirty injured. The Government termed it a sectarian attack and blamed LJ. These cases have all been effectively closed. In addition, there appeared to be a new wave of attacks on celebrations at Sufi shrines in 2005, likely led by Deobandi extremists who long had termed the celebrations "idolatrous." In March and May 2005, many died and hundreds were injured when the shrine to Pir Syed Rakheel Shah and the Bari Imam Shrine were bombed.

On October 7, 2005, two armed assailants opened fire during Friday prayer at an Ahmadiyya mosque in Mong village, Punjab, killing eight and injuring nineteen. The Government attributed responsibility to LJ.

On February 9, 2006, a suicide bomber, linked with SSP, attacked a Shi'a religious procession commemorating the month of Muharram in Hangu, NWFP, killing at least forty and injuring at least fifty. Three more died in sectarian clashes that followed the attack on February 10 and 11.

On April 11, 2006, a suicide bomber attacked a Brailvi religious commemoration of the Prophet's Birthday in Nishtar Park, Karachi, Sindh, killing fifty seven persons, including prominent Brailvi clerics and ST leaders, and injuring more than fifty. LJ and SSP have been implicated in the attack, despite unfounded assertions by JI attributing responsibility to its political rival the Muttahida Quami Movement.

Armed clashes between SSP and SMP in the Northern Areas' capital of Gilgit in July, August, September, and October 2005, left at least twenty-five dead, including two members of the Rangers paramilitary force, and at least forty-three injured. Following the final sectarian clash on October 13, 2005, the Government launched a major crackdown against both SSP and SMP in the region. Police and paramilitary forces arrested the leadership of both groups as well as clerics backing the respective organizations. These leaders remained in detention in Rawalpindi at the end of the reporting period. Violence in Gilgit has abated after the crackdown.

Unlike in the previous reporting period, there were no incidents of terrorist or extremist attacks against Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan. During the last period, Ismaili followers of the Aga Khan came under threat of societal violence for the first time. Deobandi extremist groups conducted attacks against community members in Gilgit and vandalized schools and health clinics in the Northern Areas and the neighboring Chitral district of NWFP that the Aga Khan Foundation had established. In addition, in December 2004, two Ismaili employees of the Aga Khan Health Service Office in Chitral were killed.

Al-Qa'ida-linked organizations maintained networks in the country, and its supporters periodically issued anti-Semitic statements. Hafiz Saeed, leader of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization, consistently issued statements calling for holy war against Jews and Hindus. The Government placed Saeed under house arrest from February 17 to 20, 2006, and then restricted his travel within the country to prevent his agitation during protests against cartoons of Muhammad published in a Danish newspaper.

On February 21, 2006, a court sentenced eleven members of Jandullah, an extremist group linked to al-Qa'ida, to death for their involvement in a June 2004 attack on the Corps Commander Karachi. The same individuals remained under trial for the January 2004 attack on the Pakistan Bible Society Office in Karachi.

In accordance with the Anti-Terrorist Act, the Government banned the activities of and membership in several religious extremist and terrorist groups. The Anti-Terrorist Act allows the Government to use special streamlined courts to try violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts or speech designed to foment religious hatred, and crimes against the state; however, many of the groups that the Government banned remained active.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to bolster religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There was a significant decline in new blasphemy and Hudood cases, approximately 44 percent and 164 percent from the previous reporting period, respectively. It appears that this decline could be due to the implementation of the 2005 revision to the procedures for the implementation of both the blasphemy laws and the Hudood Ordinances. Under the new procedures, senior police officials must investigate all blasphemy cases before charges are filed, and a court order must precede women's detention under the extramarital sex provisions of the Hudood Ordinances. Human rights campaigners had agitated for such changes since 2000 and continued to press for outright repeal of the laws. On July 1, 2006, President Musharraf instructed the CII to revise the Hudood Ordinances to address such concerns by August, and ordered the release of women detained under the ordinances. Approximately 700 women have already been released, many of whom were detained on Hudood charges.

The Government maintained its existing ban on terrorist and sectarian organizations known to be active in the country. The assets of such organizations remained frozen, and their identified leaders were under surveillance. Although most of the banned organizations continued to try and operate, the Government policies of monitoring, periodic raids on safe houses, periodic detention of leaders and activists, and denial of financial resources were effective in diminishing such groups' impact. During the period covered by this report, the Government launched another crackdown against such groups. On July 19 and 20, 2005, police detained approximately 320 individuals believed to have links to terrorist or extremist organizations. The Government released these individuals over the ensuing six-month period. On September 29, 2005, the Government dismantled the LJ Islamabad/Rawalpindi cell and arrested Asif Choto, a senior LJ leader. On March 29, 2006, the Government detained Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman Khalil, head of the designated terrorist organization Harakat-ul-Mujahideen, after he checked into an Islamabad hospital for medical treatment.

The Government remained in active negotiations with the sectarian boards, or wafaqs, which oversee the vast majority of the country's Islamic religious schools, or madrassahs. During the period covered by this report, the Government expelled

foreign students from the country's madrassahs and arrived at agreement on registration provisions that require madrassahs to share information on finances and curricula. The Government included in the registration ordinances a legal ban on the teaching of sectarianism, religious hatred, and/or militancy. While it was too early to measure the success of these reforms, it was generally held that the impact would be positive. Wafaqs oversaw an ongoing phase-in of modern subjects such as English, math, and science at the government's request and continued to utilize inspectors to ensure that their member madrassahs adhered to bans on the teaching of religious and sectarian hatred. Wafaqs complied with government reporting requirements on audited accounts. Despite these improvements, some challenges remain. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the wafaqs continued to discuss examination requirements without resolution, and the Madrassah Reform Committee failed to make progress in disbursement of $100 million (approximately 5.8 billion rupees) in available funds to qualified madrassahs.

Draft legislation for the creation of a National Human Rights Commission remained with the national assembly. The Government continued to work with the international community to revise the draft legislation to ensure a strong, independent monitoring body.

The Government continued to include human rights awareness as part of its police training program.

The World Council of Religions in Islamabad continued with its efforts to promote increased interaction and dialogue among various religious groups. The council, assisted by leaders from Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi communities and backed by President Musharraf, continued to organize sessions throughout the country with the support of local and provincial governments. In addition, the Religious Affairs Ministry and the Islamic Ideology Council continued to organize a number of smaller intersectarian and interfaith meetings and dialogue sessions. As a result of these meetings, Deobandi and JI religious and political leaders significantly toned down anti-Christian and anti-Hindu rhetoric.

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 legislation and the teaching of religious intolerance in public schools created a permissive environment for attacks. Police at times 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. Judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid a confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continued trials indefinitely. As a result, those accused of blasphemy often faced lengthy periods in jail and were burdened with increased legal costs and repeated court appearances. Religious extremists continued to threaten to kill all those acquitted of blasphemy charges. High-profile accused persons often went into hiding or emigrated after acquittal.

Ahmadi individuals and institutions long have been victims of religious violence, much of which is instigated by organized religious extremists. Ahmadi leaders charged that militant Sunni mullahs and their followers sometimes staged 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 July 2004, unknown assailants attempted to shoot Shahid Ahmad Dar, an Ahmadi, in Lahore. No arrests were made.

In August 2004, following a mob attack, police issued a ban on the construction of a new house of worship for the Ahmadiyya community in Tatlay Aali, Gujranwala. The ban continued during the reporting period.

In August 2004, unknown assailants killed Barkatullah Mangla, an Ahmadi lawyer and president of the Sargodha Ahmadiyya community. Police did not arrest suspects.

In November 2004, Muhammad Ishaq Danish was killed after he became a member of the Ahmadiyya community. Police did not file charges.

In December 2004 a mob attacked the construction site of an Ahmaddiya house of worship in Sahiwal. Police did not file charges.

On September 10, 2005, in Quetta, Balochistan, unknown assailants shot and killed Wasim Ahmad, an Ahmadi, en route to his business. Witnesses claimed that one of the assailants appeared to be a member of a conservative religious organization based on his dress and conduct. Prior to his killing, Ahmad had received threats from various extremist organizations demanding that he convert to Islam.

On February 12, 2006, local Islamic clerics from Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, held a procession against cartoons of Muhammad that had been published in a Danish newspaper. As the protesters came to an electronics shop owned by two Ahmadi brothers, Shakil Ahmad and Tariq Mahmud, clerics pointed out the shop's ownership by Ahmadis and led a group of protestors in attacking the store, damaging glass and inventory. Police, who were present, did not intervene to stop the protestors.

On March 16, 2006, a local Islamic cleric in Chanda Singh Wala, Kasur, Punjab, demanded that police disinter the remains of the daughter of Muhammad Hanif, a member of the local Ahmadiyya community, from the community's Muslim graveyard. Although police initially refused the request, they ultimately complied after further pressure, disinterred the remains, and handed them over to the local Ahmadiyya community for reburial in the separate Ahmadi cemetery.

On March 19, 2006, two unidentified armed men attacked and killed a prominent member of the Ahmadiyya community in Manzoor Colony, Karachi, Sheikh Rafiq Ahmad, at his store. Community leaders believed that the killing was motivated solely by Ahmad's religion.

On April 10 and 11, 2006, the Government permitted the anti-Ahmadi organization Majlis Ahrar Islam to organize a conference in the Ahmadi spiritual center of Rabwah, Punjab. Islamic clerics addressing the conference repeatedly stated that Ahmadis were traitors to Islam and rebels against the country and its constitution. Shari'a law deemed all Ahmadis apostates, and they should therefore be killed. Following the conclusion of the conference, several anti-Ahmadi participating organizations marched through the streets of Rabwah demanding death to Ahmadis.

Ahmadis suffered from societal harassment and discrimination. Even the rumor that someone might be an Ahmadi or had Ahmadi relatives could stifle opportunities for employment or promotion. Most Ahmadis were home-schooled or went to private, Ahmadi-run schools. Ahmadi students in public schools often were subject to abuse by their non-Ahmadi classmates. The quality of teachers assigned to predominately Ahmadi schools by the Government reportedly was poor. In 2002, in response to a question from Islamic clerics, President Pervez Musharraf, who had been accused of favoring Ahmadis, declared that he believed Ahmadis to be "non-Muslims."

Acts of violence and harassment against Christians continued during the period covered by this report.

In August 2004, a portion of a Christian cemetery in Basti Bohar was seized by local Muslims who refused to return it.

In October 2004, unknown assailants twice attempted to bomb a Christian church in Rawalpindi. The police did not make arrests.

In November 2004, a local Muslim leader in Loghur, Kasur demolished Christian houses in violation of a court order. Police took no action in this case.

In March 2005, a mob of approximately 150 individuals attacked a gathering of women at a Christian church in Islamabad, beating the women and destroying property. The police made no arrests.

In March 2005, two assailants attacked Christians as they were leaving Easter services at a church in Lahore. Charges remained pending.

In April 2005, Pastor Shamoor Babar and his Catholic driver, Daniel Emmanuel, were kidnapped and killed. Police made no arrests.

In April 2005, Shahbaz Masih, a Catholic, was assaulted by unknown assailants. Police made no arrests.

On February 3, 2006, Muslim vandals attacked a Catholic church in Kawanlit, district Sialkot. Furniture, windows, and religious books were destroyed. The attack was prompted by a dispute between local Christians and Muslims over a piece of land. A court had issued an order in favor of the Christians immediately before the attack.

Islamic protesters angered over the publication of cartoons of Muhammad in the Danish press attacked local Christian institutions. On February 13, 2006, protesters vandalized the missionary-run Edward's College in Peshawar, NWFP, by smashing windows in various buildings. On February 15, protestors in Peshawar, NWFP, damaged St. Michael's Convent School, St. Elizabeth Girls' College and a mission hospital run by the Church of Pakistan.µProtesters also damaged a United Presbyterian girls' school in Kasur, Punjab and tried to attack the city's Catholic church but were stopped by police.

On February 16, 2006, Islamic clerics kidnapped Christian cleric Rev. Joseph Praim from the Full Gospel Assemblies. Rev. Praim's abductors held him for five days without food and water, during which time his captors severely beat him and threatened him with death. The kidnappers told Rev. Praim that they were torturing him because Christians had published derogatory cartoons of Muhammad in Denmark.

On February 19, 2006, hundreds of Muslims ransacked and burned St. Mary's Catholic Church and St. Xavier Church in Sukkur, Sindh. The attack was reportedly in response to allegations that a Christian convert to Islam, Irfan Gill, had burned part of a Qur'an in an attempt to frame his father-in-law for blasphemy.

On March 1, 2006, a church was set on fire in Sargodha. The building suffered damages, but no one was injured. Minority groups called on the country's Muslim political and religious authorities to stop the violence and punish the culprits.

On March 30, 2006, unknown individuals attempted to burn down a Christian church in Mian Channu, Punjab. Local residents extinguished the fire, but it damaged some of the church's furnishings.

While many Christians belonged to the poorest socioeconomic groups and faced discrimination, the reason might have more to do with ethnic and social factors than with religion. Many poor Christians remained in the profession of their low-caste Hindu ancestors, most of whom were "untouchables." Their position in society, although somewhat better than in the past, did not reflect major progress despite more than one hundred years of consistent missionary aid and development. Christian students reportedly were forced to eat at separate tables in public schools that are predominately Muslim.

Hindus faced societal violence, often directed at their temples, during the period covered by this report. Criminals targeted Hindu businessmen for kidnap, particularly in Karachi. Hindus claimed they were forced to pay ransoms after police did little to recover kidnap victims.

In October 2004, unidentified persons occupied a Hindu temple in Hyderabad. Police took no action to oust the illegal occupiers.

In May 2005, unknown assailants killed Bhagat Mohan Bheel, the caretaker of a Hindu temple, and destroyed temple statues. Police made no arrests.

Societal violence against the Sikh community remained comparatively rare. Charges remained pending against several persons involved in the September 2004 attack on Sikh Gurdwara Junam Asthan in Nankana Sahib.

Ismailis reported that they were the objects of resentment of Sunni Muslims due to the comparative economic advances they had made. The Government did not harass Ismailis; however, they reported that they frequently were pressured to adopt certain practices of conservative Muslims or risk being ostracized socially.

Although there were very few Jewish citizens in the country, anti-Semitic press articles were common in the vernacular press. NGO sources pointed out that since India's 1992 establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel, the media, both mainstream and Islamic, sometimes referred to India as the "Zionist threat on our borders." Nonetheless, the attitude of the media was not reflected in the actions of the Government. In 2005, the Pakistani and Israeli Foreign Ministers met in Istanbul and President Musharraf greeted former Israeli PM Sharon at the United Nations in September 2005. President Musharraf has publicly discussed the possibility of diplomatic recognition of Israel after the establishment of a Palestinian state. The Government also cooperated in the capture of those responsible for the 2002 abduction and killing of Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl.

Some Sunni Muslim groups published literature calling for violence against Ahmadis, Shi'a Muslims, other Sunni sects, and Hindus. Some newspapers frequently published articles that contained derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews. Sermons at mosques frequently railed against Ahmadis, other Muslim groups, and Hindus.

Proselytizing generally was considered socially inappropriate among Muslims; missionaries faced some difficulties due to this perception. For example, some Sunni Muslim groups opposed missionary activities and at times issued verbal threats against missionaries to discourage them from working.

Human rights groups claimed that rape was often used against women to humiliate and dishonor them. Minority rights groups claimed that Hindu and Christian women were especially vulnerable. Due to prosecutions under the Hudood Ordinances and the high social stigma attached to rape, very few cases are reported.

Discrimination in employment based on religion appeared widespread. In particular, Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists stated that the employment situation had improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years. Christians and Hindus also found themselves disproportionately represented in the country's most oppressed so-

cial group, bonded laborers; illegal bonded labor was widespread. Agricultural, brick-kiln, and domestic workers often were kept virtually as slaves. The majority of bonded laborers in those sectors were non-Muslim. All were subject to the same conditions, whether they were Muslim, Christian, or Hindu. In June 2005, police raided sites in Sheikhupura district, Punjab Province, and freed more than 300 mostly Christian workers performing forced labor in brick kilns. Although the Government removed colonial-era entries for religious affiliation from government job application forms to prevent discrimination in hiring, the faith of some, particularly of Christians and Hindus, often could be ascertained from their names.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discussed religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Government representatives met and spoke regularly with major Muslim and minority religious groups. Embassy officers also maintained a dialogue with government, religious, and minority community representatives to encourage religious freedom and to discuss problems. Chief concerns during this reporting period included the blasphemy laws, the Hudood Ordinances, curriculum reform in the public education and madrassah education systems, treatment of the Ahmadiyya and Christian communities, and sectarian violence. Embassy officials, including the ambassador, met with leaders from communities of all faiths and NGOs working on religious freedom problems.

The embassy continued to raise concerns about the abuse of the blasphemy laws and Hudood Ordinances with the Government, members of parliament, and officials. Embassy officials participated in a number of seminars that NGOs organized to discuss these concerns with a wide spectrum of stakeholders. During all of these discussions, embassy officials continued to stress the need for the Government to end abusive and excessively harsh implementation of these laws. The new legislation that the Government enacted in January 2005 represented an important positive step in this direction. In addition to general advocacy on the law, the embassy continued to monitor a number of high-profile ongoing blasphemy cases and appeals and provided information to interested parties in the United States.

As part of its overall public education reform program, valued at $100 million (5.8 billion rupees), the United States provided substantial financial support to the Government's curriculum reform initiative, which included eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance.

Embassy officials regularly monitored progress on madrassah reform and encouraged such progress. During the period covered by this report, the ambassador met with the religious affairs minister to obtain his views on progress toward reform and to urge government cooperation. Senior officials from the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Education also raised concerns about the need for swift reform of the madrassah system with the education minister. Embassy officials encouraged and facilitated study by those involved in madrassah reform of the relationship between religious schools and state authorities in the United States, as a possible model for the country.

The embassy carefully monitored treatment of the Ahmadiyya community. During discussions with Islamic religious leaders, embassy officials urged reconciliation with the Ahmadiyya community and an end to persecution of this minority group. Embassy officials also raised and discussed treatment of the Ahmadis with members of parliament, encouraging an eventual repeal of anti-Ahmadi laws and a less severe application in the interim.

Embassy officials regularly met with religious and political leaders from all major Islamic groups. During these meetings, they raised the need to end sectarian violence and to define a more cooperative relationship between the sects. Embassy officials encouraged interfaith and intersectarian dialogue initiatives, such as the World Council of Religions. In meetings with officials from the Islamic Ideology Council and the Ministry of Religion, embassy officials encouraged them to play an active role in promoting sectarian harmony.

The embassy continued to monitor developments in high profile violence against minorities, such as the Sangla Hills case, and provided information to interested parties in the United States. The embassy also assisted local and international human rights organizations to follow up specific cases involving religious minorities.

SRI LANKA

The constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," but Buddhism is not recognized as the state religion. The constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to 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 during the period covered by this report.

Anti-conversion legislation first introduced in 2004 remained under consideration. In May 2004, the Jathika Hela Urumaya Party (JHU) presented to parliament a bill that would criminalize "unethical" conversions and on May 6, 2005, despite a supreme court ruling that some sections of the bill were unconstitutional, the JHU presented the bill for a second reading. Subsequently, the proposed bill was referred to a special parliamentary committee, which in April 2006, met for the first time. The bill remained under consideration within the committee at the end of the period covered by this report.

In June 2004, the then-minister of Buddhist affairs presented a separate draft anti-conversion bill to the cabinet. It was not formally approved; however, it was sent to the attorney general for review. In April 2005, the cabinet approved a revised version of the bill and in June 2005, the bill was formally "gazetted," the first step toward introducing it in parliament. By the end of the reporting period, it had not been introduced.

In October 2004, the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) Party formally proposed a constitutional amendment that would declare Buddhism the state religion. While the amendment remained on parliament's "order paper," the bill never reached parliament's formal agenda and made no progress over the reporting period.

Although previously the courts had generally upheld the right of Christian groups to worship and to construct facilities to house their congregations, a supreme court decision promulgated in 2003 ruled against recognizing a Roman Catholic group and determined that its medical services constituted "allurement." At the same time, the supreme court ruled that although the constitution supports the right of individuals to practice any religion, it does not support the right to proselytize. The group protested the ruling to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), which in October 2005, stated that the supreme court did not uphold International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) standards.

Since late 2003, the country has witnessed a spate of attacks on Christian churches and sometimes pastors and congregants. Approximately 250 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 close to a dozen persons in connection with the incidents.

Despite generally amicable relations among persons of different faiths, there has been an ongoing violent resistance by some Buddhists to Christian church activity, in particular that conducted by evangelical groups. There were sporadic attacks on Christian churches by Buddhist extremists and some societal tension due to ongoing allegations of forced conversions and debate on anti-conversion legislation. In May 2005, at the invitation of the Government, the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom visited and met with various religious groups and civil society.

The U.S. Government discussed 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 anti-conversion laws could have on religious freedom. The U.S. Government continued to discuss general religious freedom concerns with religious leaders and with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

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 all are practiced. Approximately 70 percent of the population was Buddhist, 15 percent Hindu, 8 percent Christian, and 7 percent Muslim. Christians tended 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 were Theravada Buddhists. Most Tamils, who made up the largest ethnic minority, were Hindu. Almost all Muslims were Sunnis; there was also a small minority of Shi'a, including members of the Borah community. Almost 80 percent of Christians were Catholics, with An-

glican and other mainstream Protestant churches also present in the cities. Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, Pentecostal, and the Assemblies of God were also present. Evangelical Christian groups have grown in recent years, although membership was 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 faiths to practice their religions freely. The Government's respect for religious freedom varied, and there was no improvement in the status of religious freedom.

Prior to the November 2005 presidential election, each religion had a ministry to oversee its affairs; however, after President Mahinda Rajapaksa took office, he replaced them with a single Ministry of Religious Affairs with four departments, one each to deal with Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian affairs. According to the legislation defining the mandates, each department should formulate and implement programs that inculcate religious values and promote a virtuous society.

On October 29, 2004, the JHU proposed a constitutional amendment declaring Buddhism to be the state religion. The JHU stated that the purpose of the amendment was strictly to protect Buddhism; however, the amendment also contained clauses restricting conversion of Buddhists. On November 25, 2004, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) challenged the amendment, and in December 2004 the CPA's petition was heard before a three-judge bench of the supreme court. The court determined that the proposed amendment was inconsistent with the constitution. The court also determined that since the amendment sought to repeal parts of the constitution, approval from a two-thirds majority in parliament and a referendum endorsing it would be required for passage. The bill remained on parliament's "order paper," the document from which agenda items are drawn; however, the JHU made no attempt to put the amendment on parliament's agenda, and the bill made no progress during the reporting period.

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 six 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.

In June 2004, the then-Minister of Buddhist Affairs also presented a draft anti-conversion bill to the cabinet. It was not formally approved, but it was sent to the attorney general for review. The cabinet approved a revised bill in April 2005 and formally "gazetted" it in June 2005, the first step toward introducing the bill in parliament; however, the bill never reached parliament, and it was not the subject of public debate during the reporting period.

The 2004 JHU and government-sponsored bills are substantially similar. Both bills carry penalties, including fines or jail sentences, for anyone convicted of or assisting in "unethical" conversion. The private member bill has heavier penalties for converting women and children, whereas the ministerial bill has such penalties only for converting children. The ministerial bill holds that for any group found guilty of performing "unethical" conversion, all its members may also be found guilty, and that any foreigner found guilty under this act would be deported and may be labeled a "prohibited visitor."

Despite the constitutional preference for Buddhism, a number of major religious festivals of other faiths were celebrated as national holidays. These included 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. The year 2006 also marks the 2,550th death anniversary of the Buddha. In commemoration, the Department of Buddhist Affairs within the Religious Affairs Ministry organized an ordination ceremony for 2,550 novice monks.

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." Such groups must either register as a corporation or as a charitable organization by having a bill put forward in parliament on their behalf.

In 2003, the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Third Order of Saint Francis requested incorporation as a non-profit organization through a bill in parliament. A citizen raised an objection to the bill, and the case went to the supreme court, which ruled against the incorporation bill. The court claimed the order could not be incorporated if it was involved in proselytizing and providing material benefit. The supreme court deemed that incorporation under such circumstances would violate the constitution. The Teaching Sisters lodged a complaint with the HRC and in April 2004, the HRC asked the Government to provide a response. The Government raised technical objections. In October 2005, the HRC provided a ruling that the supreme court decision did not meet ICCPR standards. The Government was given ninety days to respond but did not do so. Officials noted that the supreme court's decision was a constitutional determination, and as such could not be overridden by a HRC decision. The current constitution does not bring government policies fully in line with ICCPR obligations. The incorporation bill's parliamentary session ended in April 2004 when a new parliament was elected, and the country's law requires all bills that have not completed the legislative process be re-introduced if they are to be considered; no one has sought to re-introduce the bill.

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 followed curricula similar to public schools because all students had to take national exams administered by the government.

The Government placed renewed emphasis on the work of national councils for interfaith understanding in the wake of the attacks on Christian churches and evangelical groups' property.

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 eighteen 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 three 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.

After the supreme court ruled against the Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross' 2003 incorporation bill, a complaint was lodged before the HRC, which considered the case and requested a response from the Government. In October 2005, after assessing the government's response, the HRC found that the supreme court's actions did not meet ICCPR standards. Government officials remarked that the supreme court upheld the constitution, which also does not fully conform to ICCPR requirements. The Teaching Sisters have not sought to re-introduce the incorporation bill, which was made void when its legislative session ended in April 2004 due to the election of a new parliament.

The Government also 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. However, in 2001, the Government and the LTTE each announced unilateral ceasefires, and in 2002 a joint ceasefire accord was agreed to by the parties. The peace process has stalled since escalating violence in late 2005 has challenged the Ceasefire Agreement and put both parties at risk of returning to open conflict. 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 thousand lives. The military issued warnings through public radio before commencing major operations, instructing civilians to congregate in safe zones around churches and temples; however, in conflict areas in the north, the Government occasionally was accused of bombing and shelling Hindu temples and Christian churches. In 2003 some Buddhist clergy were allowed to visit shrines in LTTE-controlled areas for the first time in many years. Some Christians also visited holy sites in LTTE-controlled areas that had not been accessible to them during the period of armed conflict.

During the reporting period, some 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 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. 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. NGOs remained concerned for the men's safety. On June 17, 2006, in Pesalai, Sri Lankan 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.

There was some harassment of Christians and attacks on their property and places of worship by Buddhist extremists opposed to conversion. The police investigated many of these incidents when complaints were made, but were occasionally 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. By early 2005, several alleged attackers had been arrested.

At the height of the attacks on Christian churches in 2005, several government leaders, including then-President Kumaratunga and then-minister of Christian affairs, publicly denounced the attacks. In February 2005, at a ceremony held at the Buddhist and Pali University, Kumaratunga stated that such attacks would not be tolerated and ordered police to fully investigate each incident. The president also pledged to act against extremists.

In November 2004, the first meeting of the newly formed National Advisory Committee for Peace and Reconciliation (NACPR), formed by then-President Kumaratunga, took place. The committee was due to deliberate on matters pertaining to the peace process and to promote understanding and reconciliation among different communities; however, the NACPR failed to function during the reporting period.

In May 2004, leading Catholic and Buddhist clergy met to continue a dialogue on religious tolerance.

Since late 2003, police have arrested almost a dozen persons connected with various attacks. Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe also convened regular meetings of the four ministers dealing with religious concerns as part of their portfolios and established religious "amity" committees around the island; however these committees did not function during the reporting period.

On August 7, 2005, the Horana Police ordered Christians from the Foursquare Gospel Church in the Kalutara District to stop meeting for worship and prayer. The verbal order was issued by the Head Quarters Inspector after a mob threatened the worshippers on two consecutive Sundays—July 31 and August 7, 2005. As a result, congregants took to meeting at an alternate location.

During the commemoration of the Buddha's 2550th death anniversary in May, the Ministry of Education issued a notice instructing public schools without a Buddhist shrine room to build one. In a clarification, the Ministry of Education amended the notice to note that Christian, Muslim, or Hindu schools under the ministry's purview would not have to build a Buddhist shrine room.

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 thousand 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 is 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 was waiting 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 2003 four Muslims were killed; while the LTTE denied any involvement, this incident fueled tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the area.

Unlike in previous years, the LTTE did not target Buddhist sites during the period covered by this report; however, the LTTE did not indicate that it would abstain from attacking such targets in the future. The Government continued to keep security at a number of religious sites island-wide following the 1998 bombing of the Temple of the Tooth.

In December 2004 a group of men in the LTTE-controlled area of Vakeneri in Batticaloa District attacked and damaged what was described as a Christian family church. The police reported two men inside the church were assaulted and the church was damaged. The police claimed they were unable to take any action against the accused since the area was under LTTE control.

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.

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. At the end of the period covered by this report, the statue remained at the contested site. 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.

The LTTE has been accused in the past 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.

On July 7, 2005, In LTTE-controlled Kayankerny near Batticaloa in the east, assailants attacked the newly built Christian Family Church. Unidentified attackers dug three holes in the ground near theμfoundation of the building and detonated dynamite. The explosions caused damage to the walls, roof, and floor of the church. The church building was also set on fire. Police in Batticaloa assessed that it was most likely LTTE members who perpetrated the attack.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination based on religious differences was much less common than discrimination based on ethnicity. In general, the 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.

During the period covered by this report, Christians, both of mainstream denominations and evangelical groups, sometimes encountered harassment and physical attacks by some local Buddhists who believed they were threatened by these groups. Some Christian groups occasionally complained that the Government tacitly condoned harassment and violence aimed at them. In some cases, the police response was inadequate, and local police officials reportedly were reluctant to take legal action against individuals involved in the attacks.

The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka stated that during the reporting period, there were approximately seventy-five attacks on Christian churches, organizations, religious leaders, or congregants, 90 percent of which were reported to the police. The U.S. Embassy 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 in earnest and were not targeted at converting aid beneficiaries.

In May 2005, at the invitation of the Government, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion Asma Jahangir held several meetings in the country on religious freedom. She concluded that while allegations of forced conversion remained vague and no direct testimonies were available, second-hand accounts by credible sources indicated that conversions through "improper" means have sometimes occurred.

No action was taken during the period covered by this report in the 2003 attack against a member of the Assembly of God Church in Thanamalwila or the 2003 attack against Pastor Rozario in Galle. The Assemblies of God group in Thanamalwila abandoned the building, part of which was burned. Police have not made any arrests in either case.

No action was taken in the three separate attacks that occurred in Ratnapura in 2003. Investigations continued into 2005 but yielded no results.

No action was taken in the 2004 attack against the World Vision office in Kebithigollwa, or the 2004 arson attack against the Our Mother Most Pure Catholic shrine in Mattegoda.

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, but another hearing is scheduled for October 2006. The Apostolic church also filed a civil suit seeking compensation for damages.

In 2004, the Christian Fellowship Church at Wadduwa in Kaluthara District was attacked by a mob led by a Buddhist monk. The attackers threw rocks, attempted to assault worshippers with sticks, and damaged a police vehicle. Police have not taken any action to settle the dispute between the church and the monk. The problem was not resolved during the reporting period.

In 2004, a crowd threatened the pastor of the Prayer Tower Church in Mahawewa in reaction to a rumor that he was building a Bible school. Police made no arrests during the period covered by this report.

In May 2004, a mob of armed men attacked the Assembly of God Church in Yakkala and assaulted the church members. Police officials arrested three persons, and an initial hearing was held in September 2005. The next hearing is scheduled for August 2006. In October 2004, the same church had human excrement thrown at its outer wall. In November 2004, police arrested two men allegedly involved with the attack and referred the matter to the mediation board for settlement. On February 8, 2006, three unidentified men in masks assaulted the church's pastor. The pastor lodged a complaint with the police and gave the name of a likely perpetrator. The police took the case to court on February 15, 2006, when the magistrate remanded both the suspect and the pastor. The pastor was shortly released on bail; prosecutors did not obtain sufficient evidence to pursue the case against the suspected attacker.

On June 19 and 20, 2004, following the introduction of the ministerial anti-conversion draft bill, large groups, including Buddhist monks, attacked the Christian Fellowship Church in Wadduwa. In response to the June 19 incident, police remained at the church to provide protection. On June 20, police also were attacked while they attempted to guard the church. Police issued an arrest warrant for one of the Buddhist monks involved in the June 20 attack, but by the end of the period

covered by the report they had not located him. In November 2004, the police filed a case against four monks and one layperson who were identified in a police lineup. The accused were granted bail after a court appearance and did not spend any time in police custody. The presiding judge referred the case to the attorney general, upon whose advice the case was dismissed in 2005.

In August 2004, three days after receiving a death threat, a pastor of the Foursquare Gospel Church in Gampola, Kandy discovered a fire at his bedroom window. Police investigated; however, no further action was taken during the period covered by this report. After the fire, the pastor moved to a new location in Gampola. In May 2006, the same pastor 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 and gave a series of excuses. 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.

In December 2004, a concert in Colombo featuring Indian film stars was forced to close down after a hand grenade was thrown at the performers, killing two spectators and injuring several others. Some Buddhist monks demanded that the concert be cancelled because the proposed date coincided with the first death anniversary of a prominent monk. Police continued to investigate and offered monetary rewards for information leading to an arrest; however, no action was taken during the period covered by this report.

In December 2004, St. Michael's Catholic Church in Kutwana 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. The church used its own funds to repair the facility.

On April 25, 2005, police arrested Mohamed Nilam, a Muslim, for stoning and damaging a statue of Buddha in Nugegoda in the outskirts of Colombo. The magistrate released Nilam on bail and ordered him to report to the police every Sunday morning. A hearing was held on August 23, 2005, and Nilam publicly apologized and was released with a warning.

On May 1, 2005, a Buddhist monk-led mob attacked the Zion Prayer Center in Balapitiya, in Galle District. The pastor's wife and two other women were seriously injured in the attack, and furniture and the electric sound system were damaged. The pastor, who was away from the center at the time of the attack, filed a complaint, which was referred to the mediation board. No further action was taken during the period covered by this report.

On the evening of June 5, 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 thirty and the pastor, the mob attacked the pastor's home, causing damage to the windows and fence. The mob, which later grew to more than fifty 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 were effectively stopping him from using the facility. Another hearing is scheduled for October 2006.

On July 16, 2005, in Pulasthigama, Polonnaruwa the Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church was attacked during the night and set on fire. The central crucifix, holy altar, sacrificial items, and other valuable items were destroyed because the church was almost completely burnt down. One of the caretakers was stabbed with a knife by the attackers.

On December 20, 2005, in Lunugala (Uva Province), a group of Buddhists told a Christian family's pastor that a deceased Christian man could not be buried in the local cemetery. The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka intervened on the family's behalf, after which the burial was permitted.

On December 25, 2005, parishioners of the King's Revival Church in Alawwa in the Kurunegala Distric 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 21, 2006, in Alpitiya, a mob of approximately twenty armed men walked into the pastor of the Assembly of God Church's home. The pastor's wife was home alone with their three young children during this time. The mob issued an ultimatum that the pastor stop services and all Christian activity. The men overturned a table, chairs, and other furniture in the house before leaving, threatening that if the pastor continued his work, the group would destroy all of the family's belongings. The police were alerted and the Sunday service was held with police protection.

On February 14, 2006, the same pastor was summoned to the Police station, where a crowd of approximately eighty persons including five Buddhist monks accused him of conducting unethical conversions. He was told not to gather congregants for prayers and the mob threatened him and hit him with an umbrella in police presence. Later that same 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.

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, causing damage to the windows. 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.

On February 6, 2006, a man arrived at the Dutch Reformed Church in Galle looking for the pastor in charge, who was not there at the time. The assailant then told the pastor's wife that if the pastor visited the neighboring town of Hikkaduwa, people would kill him. The man also made derogatory and obscene statements about Jesus Christ and Christians.

On April 23, 2006, a Methodist Church in Pilyandala re-opened for the first time since 2003, when threats from Buddhist monks caused the church to close. At the re-opening, the same group of monks led a mob who let air out of congregants' tires, pushed over motorcycles, and damaged vehicles. The congregants continued to face threats, and on April 30 burning tires were placed on the road outside the church. A court hearing was scheduled for June 16.

On May 2, 2006, the United Christian Fellowship began constructing a community hall on land they purchased in Poddala in the Galle District. On May 6, 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.

According to media reports, on May 13 and 14, 2006, in Hatton, a mob threatened to stop a youth camp sponsored by a Ceylon Christian Youth Mission since it did not stop its activities in honor of the Buddhist holy day of Wesak. The Hatton police have no record of a complaint filed.

In 2003 Brother Manoharan, a member of the Ceylon Pentecostal Mission, was arrested in connection with the death of an eleven-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.

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.

SECTION IV. U.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 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 anti-conversion 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 anti-conversion issue with the country's ambassador to the United States.

The U.S. Government is a strong supporter of the peace process launched by the Government, and the U.S. embassy encourages the 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.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom 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 monitors the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political. There were no closures of officially registered mosques during the period covered by this report, although the State Committee on Religious Affairs (SCRA) announced that a number of unregistered mosques were operating and closed several unregistered mosques and prayer rooms. The SCRA removed two imams from their mosque positions. Local governments used the registration process to hinder some organizations' religious activity. The Government, including President Emomali Rahmonov, continued to enunciate a policy of active secularism, which it tended to define in antiextremist rather than in religious terms.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some minority religious groups continued to experience local harassment. 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 not only among, but also within, religious groups through public diplomacy efforts. In addition, embassy staff, including the ambassador, meet regularly with community leaders of different confessions. Embassy staff investigate instances of potential discrimination and advocate strongly for government tolerance of all religious groups. The embassy worked with international organizations to assist religious minorities and organized special events to promote religious tolerance.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 55,300 square miles and a population of approximately 7.3 million, although it was difficult to determine an accurate figure due to absence of birth registrations in some rural areas. An estimated 97 percent of citizens considered themselves Muslims, although the degree of religious observance varied widely. Overall, active observance of Islam appeared to be increasing. An estimated 30 to 40 percent of the rural population and 5 to 10 percent of urban residents regularly followed Muslim practices or attended services at mosques. The vast majority of Muslim inhabitants (approximately 90 percent of the population) were Sunni. Approximately 7 percent of Muslims were Shi'a, 40 percent of whom were Ismailis. Most Ismailis resided 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. Between one and two thousand Salafis practiced in Dushanbe. Other Muslims and the Government were tolerant of their activity.

There were eighty-four non-Muslim groups registered with the SCRA. Approximately 230 thousand Christians, mostly ethnic Russians and other Soviet-era immigrant groups, resided in the country. The largest Christian group was Russian Orthodox, but other registered organizations included Baptists (five organizations),

Roman Catholics (two), Seventh-day Adventists (one), Korean Protestants, which included the SunMin Church (two), Jehovah's Witnesses (one), and Lutherans (no data available). Other religious minorities were very small and included Baha'is (four registered organizations), Zoroastrians (no data available), Hare Krishnas (one), and Jews (one). Each of these groups was estimated to total less than 1 percent of the population, and nearly all of their members lived in Dushanbe or other large cities. An estimated 0.01 percent of the population was atheist or did not belong to any religious denomination.

Christian missionaries from western countries, Korea, India, and elsewhere were present in small numbers. The SCRA estimated the number of Christian converts since independence at up to three thousand persons. Some small groups of Islamic missionaries from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern states also visited the country during the period covered by this report.

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 monitors the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political or espousing "extremist tendencies," and some local administrative offices misinterpret the term "secular state" as involving a bias against religion.

The extremist Islamist political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir is banned, and its members are subject to arrest and imprisonment for subversion. Although there is no official state religion, the Government recognizes two Islamic holy days, Eid Al†Fitr and Idi Qurbon (Eid al-Adha in Arabic), as state holidays.

According to the Law on Religion and Religious Organizations, religious communities must be registered by the SCRA, which is under the council of ministers and monitors the activities of all religious establishments. While the official justification for registration is to ensure that religious groups act in accordance with the law, the practical purpose is to ensure that they do not become overtly political. To register with the SCRA, a national religious group must submit a charter, a list of at least ten 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 ten persons—do not have to register with the SCRA in order to worship privately.

Responsibility for registration of neighborhood mosques is divided between the SCRA and local authorities, who must agree on the physical location of a given mosque. The SCRA is the primary authority for registration of non-Muslim groups; however, such groups must also register their place of worship with local officials. According to the SCRA, 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 is required to suggest an alternative. In the absence of registration, local authorities can force the closure of a place of worship, and members can be fined administratively.

There were no cases of the SCRA 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 SCRA rejected several 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 SCRA demanded local registration for a branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses in addition to their national registration.

The country has 2,885 registered mosques for daily prayers. So-called "Friday mosques" (larger facilities built for weekly Friday prayers) must be explicitly registered with the SCRA. There are 238 such mosques registered, not including Ismaili places of worship. Only one such mosque is authorized per fifteen thousand residents in a given geographic area. Many observers contend that this is discriminatory because no such rule exists for other religious groups.

There are eighteen madrassahs, twenty Islamic colleges, and one Islamic university. Private religious schools are permitted and must be registered. Parents are allowed to homeschool their children; however, parents are not allowed to teach others' children in their home in a group setting.

During the period covered by this report, President Rahmonov continued to strongly defend "secularism," a politicized term that carries the strong connotation

of being "antiextremist" rather than "nonreligious." In national speeches the president cautioned against outsiders unfairly linking Islam to terrorism. While the vast majority of citizens consider themselves 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. Two representatives from a religiously oriented party, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), were members in the lower house of the national parliament during the period covered by this report. There also were fourteen deputies from the IRPT in district parliaments around the country. The Government incorporated the IRPT in 1997 at the end of the civil war. It 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 without government interference if they presented the material for review prior to printing. They generally do not publish religious literature but have done so on occasion, including producing copies of the Qur'an. There is no restriction on the distribution or possession of the Qur'an, the Bible, or other religious works. There were no reported restrictions on the religious-oriented press.

In January 2006 the SCRA introduced a new draft law on religion entitled, "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations," intending to replace the current law on religion. The draft would add restrictions to the existing law, such as increasing the number of worshippers required to form a mosque, forbidding children under the age of seven to study religion, and prohibiting religious associations from participating in political activities. The draft was distributed domestically for review but had not been sent to parliament by the end of the reporting period.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Official government policy contributed generally to the free practice of religion, but local governments sometimes misapplied this policy. The Government did not explicitly prohibit or discourage specific religious groups. Although the SCRA did not refuse any group registration during the period of this report, it declined to accept some applications, citing missing documentation or other technicalities. Some religious groups, unable to register, claimed the excuses were false and were a way to deny registration. Local authorities in some cases used the registration requirement to prevent activities by some groups. During the period covered by this report, local authorities detained and fined representatives of a religious group for organizing because it was not registered at the local level, even though it was registered with the national SCRA. Eventually the representatives were released.

Although the SCRA reported it did not close any registered mosques or praying rooms during this reporting period, it stated that twenty-six unregistered mosques operated in the Sughd, Khatlon, and Gorno-Badakhshan regions. Unconfirmed reports stated that authorities closed down several unregistered prayer groups. The Government was no longer actively pursuing a registration campaign, but it continued to close unregistered mosques and praying rooms.

In 2004 the local government of Tursonzade used administrative barriers to prevent the registration of a place of worship for the Jehovah's Witnesses, in spite of its national registration. The SCRA intervened on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but the city administration had not registered the group by the end of the period covered by this report.

The SCRA controlled participation in the Hajj and imposed furthered restrictions on pilgrims ("hajjis") undertaking the pilgrimage 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 SCRA and deposit $2,300 (7590 Tajik Somoni) prior to departure. Each local district "unofficially" had a quota for hajjis, and government officials registering them were known to take bribes. As a result, 3,450 citizens participated in the Hajj in 2006, indicating a steady decrease from 4,072 in 2005 and approximately 5,000 in 2004.

The Government continued to carry out "attestations" of imams, through which all imams were tested on their knowledge of Islamic teachings and religious principles. Imams could be dismissed if they did not "pass" the test. On April 3, 2006, the Government organized a seminar for Imam-Khatibs of Friday mosques in Dushanbe to teach them about the various sects of Islam. The Government also issued a textbook to schools in May 2005 on the history of Islam. Observers interpreted such government-imposed instruction as a way of controlling religious indoctrination.

In 2004 the Government allegedly used the Council of Ulamo, an ostensibly nongovernmental body that monitors and standardizes Islamic teaching, to hand down a fatwa prohibiting women from praying in mosques. This was considered by some to be a political move under the guise of religious law to reduce the access women have to IRPT messages. Some local officials forbade members of the IRPT to speak in local mosques; however, this restriction reflected political rather than religious differences.

There were unconfirmed reports that in some cases local government officials prohibited Muslim women from having their photographs taken for an internal identification document while wearing the hijab, a Muslim head covering. The SCRA claimed that this occurred rarely and that it interceded with the identification agencies in each case to make an exception. Reportedly, this was attributable to overzealous interpretation of what it meant to be a secular country. In 2004 officials refused to issue passports to approximately one hundred women in Isfara who did not want to be photographed without a hijab. According to press reports, the minister of education announced on October 19, 2005, that girls were not permitted to wear hijabs in public educational institutions. Some school officials then expelled girls who wore hijabs to school; however, the SCRA claimed that this was neither official law nor policy.

In the fall of 2005 international organizations reported that government militia positioned themselves outside of some mosques to restrict children from entering; however, no militia were seen guarding mosque entrances after January 2006. This action was taken after government officials declared children should be studying in schools, not in mosques, during the day. Citizens spoke out against militia guarding the mosques, prompting their removal.

Missionaries of registered religious groups are not restricted by law, and they continued to proselytize openly. Missionaries are not particularly welcomed by some local communities, and some religious groups experienced harassment in response to their evangelical activities. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of visa restrictions for Muslim missionaries.

In June 2005 city police found parishioners of a Christian church in Dushanbe distributing religious pamphlets and detained them for less than twenty-four hours. The church members agreed to stop distributing the brochures. Although religious advertising and literature are not against the law, church members feared local communities might not welcome the distribution and could complain to authorities, jeopardizing their organization. In May 2006 police detained nine Jehovah's Witnesses' members and confiscated their truck full of religious literature. After questioning the group for three hours, the members and literature were released.

The "ban" on printing in Arabic script was thought to be an attempt to prevent the publication of extremist literature, such as flyers circulated by the extremist Islamic political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir.

Authorities in Isfara continued to restrict private Arabic language schools (including restrictions on 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 for the past three years the Government prohibited two popular Islamic scholars from becoming members of the IRPT because it disagreed with their conservative ideology. The Government has confiscated hundreds of audio and video cassettes of their sermons from public shops. Militia also stopped Muslims from outside their districts from coming to their mosques to worship, in an attempt to restrict their teachings.

Between November 2004 and February 2005, Christian Iranian refugees fled Iran into the country. During their stay, the Government did not permit them to reside in the city of Dushanbe, instead relegating them to the city's outskirts. The refugees faced harassment from local citizens. Their children were verbally abused in schools and in some cases were physically harassed. The Iranian embassy also threatened and harassed the refugees. The Government was complacent towards this behavior and did not offer protection. The state migration service attempted to extract bribes from the refugees during each reregistration process. The Christian Iranian refugees left the country in April 2006 through the U.S. Government's resettlement program.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government reported ninety-nine persons were detained in 2005 as Hizb ut-Tahrir suspects. Some speculate that the Government may use the Hizb ut-Tahrir label to arrest those not in its favor, including members of the intelligentsia and teachers.

On May 4, 2006, IRPT member Sadullo Marupov died after falling 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. Marupov had been detained previously by the police and had told IRPT members that he was tortured with electroshock during his earlier detention. Officials alleged he was a member of Bay'at, a group the Government has labeled as extremist. The IRPT denied this claim, and media reports and local contacts have questioned whether Bay'at even exists. The Government arrested three guards in connection with the case and was investigating the incident at the end of the reporting period.

Along with several mosques and administrative buildings, Dushanbe's only synagogue was partially torn down February 8, 2006, by municipal officials in a land dispute unrelated to religious discrimination. The synagogue is located 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 offered land for a new synagogue but stated it could not itself provide compensation for the partially razed building, citing "separation of church and state."

In contrast to previous years, there were no reports of arrests of high-profile Muslims, such as the 2003 arrest and sentencing of the IRPT's deputy chairman, Shamsiddin Shamsiddinov. The IRPT stated that this arrest was politically motivated but did not allege it was part of a larger government campaign against religion.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Gradually throughout the reporting period, officials suspended 2001 prohibitions on use of loudspeakers by mosques, issued by the mayor's offices in Dushanbe. These 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 and not out towards the public. 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 hijabs, particularly to participate on the Hajj.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Conflict between different religious groups is virtually unknown, in part because there are so few non-Muslims; however, some Muslim leaders occasionally expressed the opinion that minority religious groups undermine 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.

In 2004 a Baptist missionary was killed in his church in Isfara. A police investigation uncovered two suspects, one of whom fled the country. In late February 2005 court officials sentenced one suspect of the alleged Islamic group, Bay'at, to twenty-four years in prison for the murder. The other was arrested and in April 2005 was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Although government officials claimed the two men were members of Bay'at, media reports and local contacts questioned whether the men actually belonged to such a group and if Bay'at even existed. Some claimed the Government fabricated the group as a scapegoat.

During the period covered by this report, there were no events similar to the vandalism in 2003 that included fires set in the homes of two imams.

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 intervened on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses with the SCRA and the government of Tursonzade, holding meetings and writing letters advocating for its registration. The embassy also worked with UNHCR and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to facilitate the Christian Iranian refugees' departure from the country and resettlement in the United States.

Between April 5 and 8, 2006, the embassy invited Ahmed Younis, national director of the U.S.-based Muslim Public Affairs Council, to the country to speak about Muslims in America, promote religious tolerance, and emphasize the importance of religious freedom.

The embassy supported a Central Asia regional conference for religious leaders and government officials, which was held in Dushanbe on June 8 and 9, 2006, to discuss regional problems, related to religious freedom.

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 and the destruction of the synagogue.

Embassy officers regularly met with religious leaders from across all religious groups, the Government, and international organizations to discuss religious freedom issues 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.

TURKMENISTAN

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion; however, in practice the Government continued to monitor all forms of religious expression. All groups must register in order to gain legal status. Until 2004 the only religious groups that were registered successfully were the government-controlled branch of Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity; by April 2005 nine additional minority religious groups had registered. The 2004 amendments to the law on religious organizations and subsequent presidential decrees enabled the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) to facilitate registration of some religious congregations and engendered a noticeable reduction in harassment of minority congregations, although some harassment persists. During the reporting period, the Government introduced a temporary procedure for registering branches of registered religious groups located outside of the capital, Ashgabat. However, the procedure was not clear and the implementation by government officials was not consistent. The Government limited the activities of unregistered religious congregations by prohibiting them from gathering publicly, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials. Government officials outside the capital often interpreted the law more strictly than those in Ashgabat.

The status of government respect for religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. The Government's Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) was more willing to assist minority religious groups in resolving conflicts with other government agencies. On October 20, 2005, several government agencies hosted a roundtable discussion with leaders of registered religious groups to discuss registration procedures for branch religious groups and other related concerns. In 2004 the president signed a decree pledging to register all religious groups and to adhere to generally accepted international norms and rules concerning treatment of religious minorities; however, the registration process was onerous, and additional requirements for minority congregations to register and operate existed and remained burdensome in practice. The president signed a decree in 2004 disavowing harsh requirements in an unpublished regulation and eliminating criminal penalties for belonging to an unregistered religious group. In 2004 the president granted amnesty to six Jehovah's Witnesses serving prison sentences for conscientious objection to military service and to four more on April 16, 2005.

Although the level of harassment continued to decrease for registered religious groups during the period covered by this report, most unregistered religious groups continued to experience official harassment similar to that in previous reporting periods, including detention, arrest, confiscation of religious literature and materials, pressure to abandon religious beliefs, and threats of eviction and job loss. There were reports of abuse for religious belief or observance, and there were several accounts of persons being detained for questioning in connection with practicing their

faith. The Government replaced a number of Sunni Muslim imams with individuals believed to be less independent in their interpretations of Islam, to better facilitate government control of mosques. Many experts agree that official restrictions on religious freedom, a holdover from the Soviet era, reflect the Government's concern that liberal religious policies could lead to political dissent, importing of uncensored "Western" ideas, and the emergence of extreme political interpretations. The Government appears to view active participation in, or sponsorship of, both traditional and nontraditional religious groups as a threat to its own stability.

There is no general societal discrimination or violence based on religion. 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 faiths, especially the lesser-known Protestant faiths, are viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized, but society historically has been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs. The Government's restrictions on nontraditional religious groups do not stem from doctrinal differences or societal friction between the majority Muslim population 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. During the period covered by this report, U.S. embassy representatives and U.S. State Department officials raised specific cases of religious freedom abuses in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. The U.S. ambassador, a Department of State deputy assistant secretary for European and Eurasian affairs, and the U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) urged senior Government officials to cease minority religious group harassment, assist them with establishing places of worship, stop the demolition of mosques, and simplify the branch registration process for religious groups. An embassy officer attended the Government's October 20, 2005 religious group leaders roundtable discussion. In addition the U.S. ambassador repeatedly urged the Government to make specific improvements with respect to religious freedom. Improving registration for nongovernmental groups, including religious organizations, and permitting them to meet regularly was a top U.S. Government priority. Embassy officers met with representatives of unregistered and registered minority religious groups on a continual basis and such groups expressed an increased willingness to meet with the Government.

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 figures from the Government's most recent census (1995), ethnic Turkmen constituted 77 percent of the population. Minority ethnic populations included Uzbeks (9.2 percent), Russians (6.7 percent), and Kazakhs (2 percent). Armenians, Azeris, and other ethnic groups comprised the remaining 5.1 percent. The majority was Sunni Muslim, and the largest religious minority was Russian Orthodox Christian. The level of active religious observance was 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 were predominantly Sunni Muslim. There were small pockets of Shi'a Muslims, many of whom were ethnic Iranians, Azeris, or Kurds living along the border with Iran and in Turkmenbashy City.

While the 1995 census showed that ethnic Russians comprised almost 7 percent of the population, subsequent emigration to Russia and elsewhere has reduced considerably this proportion. The majority of ethnic Russians and Armenians were Christian. Practicing Russian Christians were generally members of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). There were thirteen Russian Orthodox churches, three of which were in Ashgabat. A priest resident in Ashgabat lead the ROC within the country. He served under the religious jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox archbishop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The president appointed him to represent the Orthodox Church on the Government's CRA. There were no Russian Orthodox seminaries.

Russians and Armenians also comprised a significant percentage of members of unregistered religious congregations, although ethnic Turkmen appeared to be increasingly represented among these groups as well. There were 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 lived in and around the city of Saragt, were reportedly practicing Lutherans. Approximately one thousand ethnic Poles lived in the country, although they had been largely absorbed into the Russian community and considered themselves Russian Orthodox. The Catholic community in Ashgabat, which included both citizens and foreigners, met in the chapel of the Vatican nunciature. Foreign missionaries, typically representing evangelical Protestant denominations, operated, although the extent of their activities was unknown.

An estimated one thousand Jews lived in the country. Most were members of families who came from Ukraine during World War II. There were some Jewish families living in Turkmenabat, on the border with Uzbekistan, who were known as Bukharin 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 placed some restrictions on 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 five hundred members to five, and made all minority groups eligible to register. The amendments establish two categories of religious assemblies: Religious groups (comprising at least five and fewer than fifty members of legal age) and religious organizations (comprising at least fifty members). The amendments leave significant gray areas in the law.

The 2003 law required all religious organizations to register, made operation of unregistered religious organizations a criminal offense, further restricted religious education, and monitored financial and material assistance to religious groups from foreign sources. Parallel amendments to the criminal code imposed penalties of up to one year's imprisonment for a number of violations for which minority groups traditionally had faced administrative fines. In response to international pressure, criminal penalties were lifted in 2004, but the remaining 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. 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.

The president signed a decree in 2004 that strengthened the 2003 law on religious practice and religious organizations. A prohibitive requirement introduced in the new registration rules increased registration fees for religious organizations to $100 (2.5 million manat at the unofficial rate). In addition the MOJ was no longer obliged to publish in the local media a list of registered religious organizations, limiting the transparency of legally registered groups, isolating them from other religious communities, and limiting the ability of the public to respond when authorities harassed them. The law also gave the MOJ the right to cancel a group's registration based on vaguely defined charges.

In March 2004 the Government adopted but did not publish an implementing regulation and recommended standard charter, which stipulated onerous requirements for religious groups wishing to register. The decree imposed financial and travel restrictions on registered religious organizations. Following international pressure, these regulations were rescinded in a May 2004 presidential decree.

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 religious groups to successfully register. However, since the 2004 decree reducing the minimum required number of adherents for registration, nine new religious groups have 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 (Church of Christ); and New Apostolic Church of Turkmenistan. Shi'a Muslims were not registered by the end of the reporting period, and there were no reports that they tried to register since the March 2004 decree, although they remained in contact with the CRA, which reported to President Niyazov and ostensibly acted as an intermediary between the government bureaucracy and registered religious organizations.

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.

Some groups remained either fearful of registering, citing the amount and type of information the Government required, or refused on principle to do so. During the reporting period, at least two minority religious groups applied for registration, but had not been successful by the end of the reporting period; during previous years, the Government would delay or deny applications citing unsubstantiated technical reasons. 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. According to the amended law, 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 moderate Islam, mostly based on religious and national traditions. To further regulate Islamic teaching, in January 2006, the Government published the book National and Religious Traditions of Turkmen Since Ancient Times, which contains numerous references to following the president's spiritual guides Ruhnama and Ruhnama II. The president publicly encouraged all clerics to "read the book in mosques," and declared, "he doesn't want Turkmen religious rituals to create disagreements among believers."

The CRA includes imams, an ROC priest, and government representatives. 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 pays most Muslim clerics' salaries, approves all senior cleric appointments, and requires the latter to report regularly to the CRA.

Throughout the reporting period the CRA continued to urge imams to accord greater attention to President Niyazov's spiritual-social books on culture and heritage, Ruhnama and Ruhnama II, by teaching them as religious texts and placing them next to the Qur'an in some mosques. Phrases from the Ruhnama were inscribed on the large mosque in President Niyazov's home village of Gypjak. In 2003 the former mufti of the country, Nasrullah Ibn Ibadullah, was replaced, secretly tried, and sentenced in 2004 to twenty-two 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 twenty-seven-year-old recent seminary graduate Rowshen Allaberdiyev.

The Government recognizes only Sunni Muslim holy days as national holidays. These include Gurban Bairam (Eid al-Adha), a three-day holiday commemorating the end of the Hajj, and Oraza-Bairam (Eid al-Fitr), commemorating the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting.

The Government does not offer alternative civilian service for conscientious objectors; individuals who want to refuse military service for religious reasons are offered noncombatant roles within the military. During the period covered by this report,

one member of the Jehovah's Witnesses was placed in a psychiatric hospital for refusing to serve in the military; he was subsequently released.

There is no official religious instruction in public schools; however, the Government requires all public schools and institutes of higher learning to hold regular instruction on the Ruhnama. The Ministry of Education requires that each child bring a personal copy of the Ruhnama to school.

Article Six of the November 2004 law allows mosques to provide religious education to children after school for four hours a week with the approval of parents. 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. In 2003 a Ministry of Justice newspaper, Adalat, published a vitriolic attack against Hare Krishnas and Jehovah's Witnesses, describing the groups as foreign and implying they were dangerous. There were confirmed reports that several district-level government officials and a local imam attempted to force an ethnic Turkmen Christian convert to renounce his faith.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Almost all registered religious minority groups in the country reported fewer instances of harassment than in the previous reporting period. However, regional affiliates of registered groups experienced harassment by provincial and district law enforcement agencies. 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 remain illegal, with violators subject to fines and administrative arrest under the administrative code.

The Government restricts unregistered religious groups from establishing places of worship, and violations constitute an administrative offense. Registered groups also experienced difficulties establishing and maintaining places of worship. Two registered minority groups renting worship centers were asked by landlords, one public and one private, to vacate their premises after the landlords received visits by security service and municipal officers. Both groups found alternative places of worship. Several minority religious groups said that the largest remaining 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 are rented and two are 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 in locating 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 continue to practice quietly, largely in private homes.

During the period covered by this report, the Government replaced a number of experienced imams with younger ones who had attended government-approved training, thus facilitating government control. In October 2005, Ata tribe Muslims, one of the six sacred tribes, reported that government officials required all imams serving at one of the Ata tribe shrines to give all financial donations to the Government.

One mosque in Turkmenbashy City was destroyed during the reporting period. 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 suburb of Ashgabat, reported they can no longer bury their family members in traditional cemeteries but instead need to do so at a centralized location. The Government restricts the number of

mosques by requiring government permission for construction. Government policy is that every community should have one mosque; however, in 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. Prior to 2003, the Abu Bekir mosque in Ashgabat was closed, and ethnic Uzbek imams from three mosques were ousted for resisting the council's pressure.

There are at least three Shi'a Muslim places of worship, two near Ashgabat and one in Turkmenbashy. Other Shi'a mosques still stand, but the Government does not permit imams to work in them. The Government continued to restrict their construction.

In 2006 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 journey to Mecca. Transportation was provided free of charge by the national airline.

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. Also in 2005 the Government replaced the Turkish head of the Turkmen Turkish International University with a Turkmen national, stating the university was conducting unauthorized religious education. In 2004 an Islamic secondary school operating under the auspices of the sole remaining theological faculty was closed, reportedly in part because school administrators and teachers refused to promote the Ruhnama as an orthodox Islamic text.

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 non-ethnic Turkmen. In December 2005 the local district supervisor accused an ethnic Turkmen Baptist leader in Galkynysh district of betraying his national culture by not practicing Islam. According to the Norway-based religious news organization Forum 18, in December 2005 a commission of government officials and a local imam pressured an ethnic Turkmen convert to Christianity to renounce his faith, but he refused and was subsequently released.

There were several high-level officials in the Government with Russian Orthodox heritage. 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 monitors peaceful minority religious groups, particularly those perceived to have connections with or support from a supranational hierarchy. The law prohibits foreign missionary activity, although in practice both Christians and Muslims working in the country in other capacities engage in religious outreach. The Government denies visas to foreigners suspected of conducting or intending to conduct missionary activity. Forum 18 reported on June 14, 2006 that Russian citizen Aleksandr Frolov was deported on June 10, 2006 for engaging in illegal religious activity and noncompliance with immigration laws. In May 2006 a foreign citizen worshipping with an unregistered religious group was requested to leave the country. That group is attempting to register. In January 2006 a Ukrainian worshipper at the registered Church of Christ was deported for affiliating with a religious minority group. In 2004 President Niyazov warned the newly appointed mufti (who was subsequently replaced) against accepting money from foreigners seeking to influence mosques to propagate a more fundamentalist message. The 2003 law on religion stipulated that religious groups must report any financial or material assistance received from foreign sources.

In June 2006 the registered Church of Christ pastor was cautioned by the deputy chairman of the CRA against distributing business card invitations for the Church of Christ worship services. The deputy chairman said the practice was not a good idea although he admitted it was not illegal.

By decree, publishing religious literature is prohibited, limiting the availability of Qur'ans, Bibles and other religious literature. Sacred religious books are rarely available for purchase.

The Government enforces the use of President Niyazov's spiritual books, Ruhnama and Ruhnama II, in educational institutions, government offices, and mosques. Copies of the book are kept in some mosques, and authorities have pressured religious leaders to place it alongside the Qur'an and to preach Ruhnama in

their services. In 2003 the Ministry of National Security (MNB) closed down a mosque for failing to place the Ruhnama on the same stand with the Qur'an for Friday prayer.

In practice the CRA must approve imported religious literature. Since all members of the CRA are government officials, and either 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. During the reporting period, one minority religious group had received permission to import thirty Bibles; however, two groups were denied permission to import religious literature. On two occasions the State Customs Service confiscated religious books and disks that unregistered minority group members were carrying for personal use.

In 2005 the MNB and regional government officials harassed some members of minority religious groups for not sending their children to school on Saturdays, their day of worship. The Government reportedly threatened to revoke their registrations if their children did not attend. Public school is held Monday through Saturday and by law children must attend.

The Government continued to discriminate against members of religious groups with respect to employment.

During 2005 and 2006 the Jehovah's Witnesses, an unregistered group, were harassed repeatedly. The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that members/believers in all five welayats (provinces) were harassed, detained, and interrogated during the reporting period. According to their report, Jehovah's Witnesses were persecuted for proselytizing and having religious literature in their homes. On August 5, 2005 Anew (near Ashgabat) police threatened to fine Tatyana Khodzhamukhamedova if she continued preaching. On September 8, 2005, Oksana Khamrakulyeva and Vadim Ivakhnik were apprehended by police for proselytizing in Ashgabat. On December 7, 2005 police from Garagum Etrap, Mary Welayat threatened Maya Mukhametniyazova and unsuccessfully attempted to force her to renounce her faith. In 2004 officials harassed a member in Ashgabat; throughout the year, authorities confiscated Bibles at the border and from private homes.

Forum 18 reported on November 9, 2005, that two women affiliated with an unregistered religious minority group were denied permission to leave the country in October 2005 to attend a Bible College in Azerbaijan. Immigration officers in Turkmenbashy City prevented their travel although they had the requisite documents certifying they had their parents' consent to travel.

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. Forum 18 reported on May 31, 2006, that unregistered Council of Churches Baptist group member Shageldy Atakov was prohibited from leaving the country on May 25, 2006. In October 2005 three members of two minority religious groups were prevented from traveling outside the country. One of the three was told that he was restricted from leaving because he had previously taken an extended international trip. A Ministry of National Security officer told him he should be eligible to travel abroad again in one year. In January and July 2005 a Pentecostal pastor was restricted from international travel, but not given an explanation. In 2004 two Jehovah's Witnesses were prevented from boarding a flight to Kiev. In 2004 Deutsche Welle Radio reported that five Jehovah's Witnesses were removed from a flight from Ashgabat to Moscow because they were blacklisted and forbidden to leave the country.

Foreign members of registered and unregistered religious groups continued to be denied entry visas. A request for a foreign visitor from the Seventh-day Adventist Church was denied for nine months. The head of the Bible Society from Uzbekistan reportedly was barred from visiting in 2004. According to Forum 18, in 2004 a group of Seventh-day Adventists was denied entry visas, although their sponsors were members of a registered church. In recent years Jehovah's Witnesses and Hare Krishnas have also been denied entry.

Reportedly, the Moscow ROC patriarch denied the Government's request to circumvent the Tashkent patriarch and allow the local church to be directly subordinate to Moscow.

During the reporting period, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was denied compensation pursuant to a court decision for a church building demolished in 1999.

Several registered religious minority groups reported that the Government monitors them by attending their gatherings; nonetheless, communities continue to engage in regular activities. The level of harassment has remained constant over the past year. Officers from the Sixth Department in Ashgabat, the division charged

with fighting organized crime and terrorism, still occasionally question members of religious minorities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The mistreatment of some unregistered religious minority members, which began in 2003, continued and was extended to the Muslim community. In 2004 the country's popular and respected former mufti, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, was secretly tried and sentenced to twenty-two years in prison, reportedly for his alleged role in a failed 2002 coup plot. Ibadullah had been dismissed as mufti in 2003, reportedly in part for his refusal to teach the president's book, Ruhnama, as a sacred text. Little is known about the whereabouts or the condition of Ibadullah, despite calls from the international community for access to him and for his release.

Muslim religious leader Hoja Ahmed Orazgylyjov remained isolated in internal exile in Tejen for alleged criminal activity. Some believe his refusal to publicly support the Niyazov regime, and his own strict religious beliefs, contributed to his exile.

The Government threatened members of minority religious groups with fines, loss of employment and housing, rape, and imprisonment because of their beliefs. There were also reports of beatings and raids.

A member of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mary was held for a few weeks in November 2005 because of his conscientious objection to military service. The president announced in June 2004 that all imprisoned conscientious objectors should be released. Subsequently, four Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced to prison because of their objection to military service but were released in April 2005. In 2004 the Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative (an opposition group operating out of Vienna) reported that three unnamed Baptists had gone into hiding to avoid arrest for refusing conscription on religious grounds.

On March 2, 2005, Jehovah's Witnesses member Nazikgul Orazova was called to the Internal Affairs Ministry for questioning, and was beaten and threatened with fines. She was detained on four additional occasions in March 2005, and on April 5, 2005 was ordered to pay an approximately fifty-dollar fine (1,250,000 manat) for proselytizing and possessing religious literature. A Forum 18 report indicated that another member of Jehovah's Witnesses was fined a large sum in 2004. In 2004 Jehovah's Witnesses Gulkamar Dzhumayeva and Gulsherin Babkuliyeva were arrested for proselytizing. The women were threatened and held overnight. Also in 2004, based on her affiliation with the Jehovah's Witnesses, Bilbil Kulyyeva was forcibly evicted from a hostel by an Ashgabat official of the CRA.

Two raids on meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses occurred in 2004, one, according to a report from Forum 18 News Service, in a private home in Ashgabat the day after the 2004 presidential decree pledging adherence to international standards for respect of religious freedom. In the other raid, a female member was taken to a police station, forced to write a statement dictated by the police, and was sexually harassed by a district police officer.

In 2004 authorities entered the home of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses and demanded he immediately pay a fine from 2001 that allegedly remained unpaid.

The CRA pressured a member of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ashgabat to renounce his faith; he was fired from his job when he refused. In 2003 as many as forty members of the group, male and female, were taken to the Sixth Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The males were beaten, all were required to renounce their faith in writing, and their passports were confiscated until fines were paid.

There were no reports of authorities beating Hare Krishnas; however, in November 2005, Hare Krishna devotee Cheper Annaniyazova was sentenced to seven years in prison for having illegally crossed the border in 2002. In July 2005 she was forcibly detained in a psychiatric hospital until she was tried and sentenced to seven years imprisonment for her 2002 crime. In April 2005 for violating a city ordinance, Ashgabat city officials threatened the Krishna Consciousness Society with the confiscation of their place of worship, a privately owned residence that was used as a temple. In 2003, according to Forum 18, authorities raided a meeting of the Krishna Consciousness Society in Ashgabat and beat one member during an interrogation. Authorities reportedly filmed the occupants of the home, confiscated all religious articles and literature, and fined the group.

Local officials occasionally continued to harass religious minorities, often because these authorities were not aware of the 2004 presidential decree. In 2004, according to the Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative, secret police officers, representatives of the city administration for religious affairs, and police officers raided a meeting of the Krishna Consciousness Society in a private home in Mary.

In 2003 Geldy Khudaikuliev, a Baptist congregation leader in Gokdepe, was detained without charge for six days, and was released as a result of international pressure. In April 2005, according to Forum 18, five members of a Baptist Church

in Turkmenabat were fined approximately sixty dollars (1.5 million manat) for holding a small service.

According to a Forum 18 report, in 2003 a deaf and mute Baptist woman was summoned to court where she was threatened with fines and a fifteen-day imprisonment. Forum 18 also reported that another deaf and mute Baptist woman was summoned to court in 2003. She was also threatened with fifteen days' imprisonment if she failed to pay a fine.

Individuals were also fined in 2003, after authorities raided a Baptist prayer meeting in Turkmenabat. That same year police raided the meeting of an unregistered Christian group, confiscated its Bibles, and fined its leaders twelve dollars (approximately 300,000 manat). Two court decisions supported the actions.

According to Forum 18, in 2004 a Hindu was forced by police officers to sign a statement renouncing his beliefs after being threatened with physical violence and criminal punishment.

Reports of authorities arbitrarily arresting and interrogating members of unregistered minority religious groups who met to worship continued. During such incidents, 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; confiscating religious literature; and detaining members.

In 2004 a small group of Baha'is were detained and questioned for a brief period by local security officials.

Forum 18 reported on May 23, 2006 the demolition of an Armenian Apostolic church (the structure had not been used as a church in recent memory) and of a Sunni mosque in Turkmenbashy.

On July 19, 2005, police interrupted an unregistered Baptist group's worship service in Turkmenabat and hit member Asiya Zasedatelevaya with a Bible. In July 2005, police also raided an unregistered Baptist branch meeting in Mary and questioned members in attendance. On August 14, 2005, police raided an outdoor meeting of an unregistered Baptist branch in Dashoguz.

In August 2005 an estimated thirty suspected "Wahabbis" were reportedly detained in Ashgabat.

On September 10, 2005, a Seventh-day Adventist branch meeting was raided in Turkmenabat and members were threatened with fines, but the CRA intervened to positively resolve the issue for the threatened members.

On October 18, 2005 and January 13, 2006, Jehovah's Witnesses leader Andrey Zhbanov was detained by the police to prevent him from attending a U.S. embassy religious group reception and then a meeting with a senior U.S. Government official.

On December 17, 2005, a police officer, district government representative, and a local CRA representative raided a meeting of an unregistered branch of Baptists in Galkynysh Etrap of Lebap Welayat. The officials confiscated Bibles, threatened group members, and reportedly forced them to sign letters proclaiming they would not continue to read the Bible, but would only read the Ruhnama.

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported numerous cases of harassment, detention, and abuse. They reported that on October 13, 2005, the home of Dzhamilya Kerimov, one of their members in Ashgabat, was searched without a warrant for religious literature. During her subsequent two-day detention she was beaten and fined approximately six dollars (150 thousand manat). In March 2006 Azatlyk Etrap, Ashgabat police hit and forced a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Vladimir Muratov, into a police car and confiscated his Bible and religious literature.

Forced Religious Conversion

In December 2005 an ethnic Turkmen Baptist leader in Galkynysh district was humiliated by the local governor, who accused him of betraying his national culture by not practicing Islam.

In January 2006 there was a report of local government officials and an imam pressuring an ethnic Turkmen convert to Christianity to renounce his faith, but he refused.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 the 2004 presidential decree amending registration requirements, nine religious minorities have registered: The Evangelical Christian Baptist Church of Turkmenistan; the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Turkmenistan; the Baha'i Community of Turkmenistan; the Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishnas); the Full Gospel Christian Church of Turkmenistan (Pentecostals); the Light of the East Church (Dashoguz Pentecostal Church); the Greater Grace Church

of Turkmenistan; the International Church of Christ; and the New Apostolic Church of Turkmenistan.

Minority religious groups reported that harassment continued to decrease, and that conditions were much better than in 2003–2004. Numerous representatives of registered minority religious groups stated that the MOJ and security services had started to display a more helpful and positive attitude. Some minority religious leaders commented that the attitude of the CRA was more helpful. Several religious groups continued to search for places of worship; some stated financial difficulty rather than government interference was the major obstacle in their search. In September 2004 police returned Bibles that had been confiscated from a Baptist group and apologized for their actions. During the reporting period, the CRA facilitated the return of confiscated Seventh-day Adventists' Bibles; customs officers had interrupted the delivery of the foreign mailed books.

In response to international pressure, President Niyazov pardoned conscientious objectors in 2004 and 2005. Unlike in previous years, incarcerated Jehovah Witnesses were not singled out for abuse in prison and were permitted to pray and to have access to Bibles.

On October 20, 2005, the Government hosted a minority religious group roundtable to discuss pressing concerns. During the meeting the Government announced a temporary procedure to register branches of registered religious groups via powers of attorney.

The Government assisted some minority religious groups in locating appropriate places of worship and refrained from interfering with registered groups that met in private homes. The CRA intervened and resolved a misunderstanding between local law enforcement agents and a minority branch religious group in Turkmenabat.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

There were no reports of general societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the period covered by this report.

Restrictive government control, indigenous Islamic culture, and seventy years of Soviet rule have meant that traditional mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in society. Local interpretations of Islam place a heavy premium on rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death ("sadakas"), featuring music and dancing that more traditional Muslims view as unorthodox. Together with shrine pilgrimage, such rituals play a greater role in local Muslims' expression of Islam than regular prayer at mosques.

Many Muslims do not regularly attend mosques; however, the overwhelming majority of the population identify themselves as "Muslim," and national identity is linked to Islam. (Turkmen society considers an individual to be born into an ethnoreligious group.) Departures from the pattern are rare and either receive little support or are criticized. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert from Islam to other faiths are viewed with suspicion and sometimes ostracized. Ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups accused of disseminating religious material receive harsher treatment than members of other ethnic groups, particularly if they received financial support from foreign sources.

Despite strong ties between Islam and national identity, the society historically has been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs. For example, in the early part of the 20th century Ashgabat was a refuge for 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.

During the period covered by this report, U.S. embassy representatives and visiting U.S. Department of State officials raised cases of religious freedom abuse in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. The embassy conveyed to the Government specific steps it should take in order for the country to improve its standing in regards to respect for freedom of religion. Visits in 2004 and October 2005 by staff of the U.S. Department of State's Office of International Religious Freedom, who met with government officials and members

of faith groups, underscored the importance of the issue to the U.S. Government. U.S. embassy representatives continued to encourage the Government to explain to local authorities—and encourage implementation of—presidential decrees and the laws passed in 2004.

The ambassador and embassy officers raised specific reports of abuse and urged greater respect for religious freedom in meetings with the president, foreign minister, minister of justice, and the CRA. Embassy officials also requested that the Government assist registered religious groups in finding places to hold services.

The embassy encouraged the Government to host the October 20, 2005 roundtable meeting with minority religious groups. A U.S. deputy assistant secretary for European affairs raised the issue of religious freedom during his meeting with President Niyazov in January 2006 and he also held a roundtable discussion with leaders of minority religious groups. In May 2006 the U.S. ambassador to the OSCE raised religious freedom issues during meetings with the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of justice, and the CRA.

In September 2005 embassy officers held meetings with each of the five regional imams, who are also the regional representatives of the CRA, and made visits to many mosques in all five regions of the country.

The ambassador and 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, another indication that, for some, the religious freedom situation improved.

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 religions, 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.

There was a decline in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of a variety of Christian denominations, had difficulty satisfying the strict registration requirements set out by the law. As in previous years, Protestant groups with ethnic Uzbek members reported operating in a climate of harassment and fear. Law enforcement officials raided and harassed some registered groups, several of which were subsequently deregistered and closed. 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 Government pressured the banned Islamic group Akromiya (Akromiylar), especially in Tashkent and Andijon, with those actions spilling over into violence and deaths in Andijon in May 2005. The Government generally did not interfere with worshipers attending sanctioned mosques and granted approvals for new Islamic print, audio, and video materials. During the period covered by this report, the Government announced a release of an unknown number of prisoners of conscience as part of a large-scale amnesty. The number arrested remained below the levels reported in 1999–2001. A small but growing number of "underground" mosques operated under the close scrutiny of religious authorities and the security services. Mosques operating without registration are technically illegal and operate only with the indulgence of the local government. Although mosque attendance in some locations declined for a short time after the May 2005 violence in Andijon, overall attendance has risen significantly since 2004, and even more sharply since May 2005.

The generally tolerant relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, neighbors, family, and employers often continued to

pressure ethnic Uzbek Christians, especially recent converts and residents of smaller communities. On at least two occasions during the period of this report, sermons against missionaries and Uzbeks who convert from Islam were noted. 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.

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. The programs included the three-year University of Washington partnership program for Cultural and Comparative Religious Studies and Community Connections exchange programs on the topic of Islam in a Religiously Diverse United States. The Government closure of the Tashkent office of the U.S. Government-funded International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) has hindered administration of its program on Cultural and Religious Pluralism in Uzbekistan. The Government also closed two of the embassy's other program-implementing organizations during the period of this report, ABA/CEELI and Freedom House, whose human rights programming included components on protecting religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 172,742 square miles, and an estimated population of 27.3 million. International experts believe the population has sustained a loss of 2 to 3 million people in recent years due to the growing trend of labor migration from Uzbekistan to neighboring countries, Russia, South Korea, the Middle East, and the United States. 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 88 percent of the population is nominally Muslim. Approximately 9 percent of the population is Russian Orthodox, though this percentage steadily declines as the number of ethnic Russians and other Slavs remaining in the country decreases. A growing number of Hanafi Muslims and Russian Orthodox adherents actively practice their religion. Outside of Tashkent, Muslim believers may now outnumber nonbelievers. During the period covered by this report, mosque attendance has 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. 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 since 1991.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government 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.

Although the law treats all religious denominations equally, the Government shows its support for the country's Muslim heritage by funding an Islamic university and the preservation of Islamic historic sites. As in prior years, the Government provided logistical support for 5,000 selected Muslims to participate in the Hajj, but the pilgrims paid their own expenses. The Government controls the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan (the Muftiate), which in turn controls the Islamic hierarchy, the content of imams' sermons, and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials. Kurbon Hayit and Roza Hayit are holy days that are also considered national holidays.

On June 22, 2006, President Karimov signed into law a series of amendments concerning religious literature. An amendment to the Administrative Code, Article 184–2, punishes "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." A new article of the 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."

On December 28, 2005, President Karimov signed into law amendments to both the Criminal Code (Article 217 Part 2) and Administrative Code (Article 201), increasing fines for repeated offenses of violations of the law on religious activity, such as illegal meetings, processions, and ceremonies. The fines are now 200 to 300 times the minimum monthly wage of $8 (9,500 soum), under the Criminal Code and 50 to 100 times under the Administrative Code, raised from 50 to 75 times and 5 to 10 times respectively.

The 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (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 one hundred citizen members to the local branches of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), thus suppressing the activities of those groups seeking to worship outside the state-sanctioned system. This provision enables the Government to ban any group by finding technical grounds for denying its registration petition. The Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA), under the Cabinet of Ministers, oversees registered religious activity. New mosques continued to face difficulties gaining registration, as did those closed previously that re-applied.

To register, groups also must report in their charter a valid legal address. Local officials, on occasion, have denied approval of a legal address to prevent religious groups from registering. The MOJ has also cited this requirement in explaining local officials' decisions. The Jehovah's Witnesses' Tashkent congregation had its registration application denied on these grounds. The Jehovah's Witnesses Ferghana congregation encountered problems renting property when a new city administration cancelled its rental agreement. Some groups, such as the Tashkent International Church, have been reluctant to purchase property without assurance that their registration would be approved. Others claim that local officials arbitrarily withhold approval of the addresses because they oppose the existence of Christian churches with ethnic Uzbek members. Even the Architecture Administration and Land Registry must approve the construction buildings for religious entities.

Some Christian groups 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, including the Mir (Peace) Presbyterian Church in Nukus, the United Church of Evangelical Christians/Baptists in Tashkent, the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Andijon, the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik, and the Jehovah's Witnesses. In May 2005 the MOJ deregistered Emmanuel, once the only registered Protestant church in Nukus, in the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan and ordered it to close. The Greater Grace Christian Church in Samarkand has temporarily suspended its five-year quest for registration. 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, have reported that they prefer not to bring themselves to the attention of authorities by submitting a registration application that obviously does not meet legal requirements. There are a few groups that refuse on principle to seek registration because they challenge the Government's right to require registration.

As of June 30, 2006, the Government had registered 2,224 religious congregations and organizations—an increase of 24 from 2,200 recorded in July 2005. Mosques, Muslim educational institutions, and Islamic centers comprised 2,042 of the total registered, an increase of 27, while the number of registered Christian groups decreased by 3. The 182 registered minority religious groups include 59 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 Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 Krishna Consciousness group, 1 Temple of Buddha, 1 Christian "Voice of God" Church, and 1 Armenian Apostolic.

A 2003 decree of the Cabinet of Ministers outlining a change in registration requirements for international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) restricted the activities of faith-based entities. Partly on the basis of the new requirements, the Government denied accreditation or visas to more than a dozen employees and volunteers from various faith-based organizations during the period covered by this report. Statements by government officials, as well as documents disseminated to the NGOs by the MOJ, indicated that the Government intended the new requirements,

in part, to curtail the activities of international NGOs that proselytize as part of their charitable activities.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (1998 Religion Law) provides for freedom of worship, freedom from religious persecution, separation of church and state, and the right to establish schools and train clergy; however, the law also severely limits religious activity. It restricts religious rights that are judged to be in conflict with national security, prohibits proselytizing, bans religious subjects in public schools, prohibits the private teaching of religious principles, and requires religious groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials. The CRA must approve all religious literature. Article 14 of the law prohibits the wearing of "cult robes" (religious clothing) in public places by all except "those serving in religious organizations." Authorities did not appear to enforce this provision during the period covered by this report.

The Criminal Code formally distinguishes between "illegal" groups, which are those that are not registered properly, and "prohibited" groups, such as the Islamic political party HT, 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 five 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 three years in prison. The code also provides penalties of up to twenty 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. In contrast with past years, there were few reports of such practices during the reporting period.

The Criminal and Civil Codes contain stiff penalties for violating the Religion Law and other statutes on religious activities. In addition to the prohibited activities that include organizing an illegal religious group, the law also proscribes persuading others to join such a group and drawing minors into a religious organization without the permission of their parents. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal.

The law prohibits religious groups that do not have a registered central administrative body from training religious personnel. 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. There are ten madrassahs (including two for women), which provide secondary education. 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, although, in practice, graduates from the Islamic University have been appointed imams after graduation, which provides another mechanism for the Government to directly influence mosques.

The Government restricts Shi'a Islamic education by not permitting the training of Shi'a imams inside the country, and not recognizing such education received outside the country. 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. The Russian Orthodox Church operates two monasteries (one for women, one for men) and a seminary and offers Sunday school education through many of its churches. The government Jewish school operates in Tashkent's Yakkasaroy District. Other religious faiths offer religious education through their religious centers.

The law prohibits the teaching of religious subjects in public schools, the private teaching of religious principles, and the teaching of religion to minors without parental consent. Nevertheless, a course called "Comparative Religion" is taught at the Andijon Foreign Languages Institute, and likely other institutes around the country, for students of university age. On June 26, 2006, according to the newspaper Novy Vek, authorities closed a religious school for children in Tashkent Province and charged two teachers with involvement in a religious extremist organization. The report alleged that the school was providing radical religious education to young

children. In March 2005, authorities closed an unlicensed Islamic kindergarten in Ferghana Province, according to the newspaper Voice of Uzbekistan.

In 2003 a panel of experts convened by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR), reviewed the 1998 Religion Law and associated criminal and civil statutes and concluded that they were in violation of the international norms for religious freedom. The OSCE submitted a number of recommendations, including lifting the bans on proselytizing and private religious instruction and decriminalizing activities of unregistered religious organizations. The Government, through the CRA, agreed to consider the ODHIR recommendations but took no action by the end of the period covered by this report.

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 which 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 Uzbekistan Criminal Code. Citizens charged under these sections (particularly Article 244, Section 2) are frequently charged with being members of the extremist Islamist political organization HT, which promotes hate and praises acts of terrorism, although HT maintains that it is committed to nonviolence. The party's virulently anti-Semitic and anti-Western literature and websites call for the overthrow of secular governments, including those in Central Asia, to be replaced with a 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 (although the failure to observe due process and other norms constitute human rights violations). However, in thousands of cases authorities have asserted HT membership based solely on outward expressions of devout belief or have made false assertions of HT membership as a pretext for repressing the expression of moderate religious belief. Estimates from credible sources suggested that as many as 4,500 of the estimated 5,000 to 5,500 political prisoners being held in detention were members of the political movement HT. It is difficult to estimate precisely the number of persons arrested on false charges of extremism and difficult to know how many of those were under suspicion because of their religious observance. As in previous years, authorities arbitrarily arrested a large percentage of those taken into custody on charges of extremism.

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 some religious organizations, 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, and generally providing ethnic Russians, Jews, and foreigners greater religious freedom than Muslim ethnic groups, particularly ethnic Uzbeks. The Government tolerates Christian churches, for the most part, 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 out of 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 Government, citing national security concerns, has conducted a repressive campaign against persons perceived as Islamic extremists. Government employees generally feel less free to perform their religious responsibilities than do citizens in the private sector, as 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.

While somewhat supportive of moderate Muslims, the Government is intolerant of Islamic groups that it perceives to be extremist. A small but growing number of unofficial, independent mosques are allowed to operate quietly under the watch of official imams. Some sources have claimed that imams of registered mosques are required to submit lists of individuals in their congregations who may have extremist

tendencies. Unlike the past reporting period, there were no new reports that the Government pressured some mahalla (neighborhood) committees and imams to report on 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 generally suppressed outward expressions of religious piety. Following the May 2005 violence in Andijon, authorities arrested some journalists and human rights activists on charges of religious extremism. There were also credible reports of mahalla committee chairmen delivering special lectures to community gatherings in which they actively discouraged worshipping in mosques. Many sources report that the atmosphere among the Muslim community has improved, with many mosques overflowing into the streets for lack of space during Friday prayer. The Government, while controlling the imams' message and monitoring mosque activities closely, has loosened its grip on those whose appearance or behavior suggests they are observant Muslims, allowing individuals to practice their faith within the confines of a controlled environment. Nevertheless, there is an apparent reluctance to appear overly observant, as hardly any young men attending Friday prayers are bearded.

Unlike during the weeks immediately following the July 2004 terrorist attacks, when Muslim women reported feeling unease about wearing the hijab and several female students were reportedly suspended from Tashkent's Pedagogical University for wearing it, there were no reports of women feeling uncomfortable about doing so during the reporting period. Nevertheless, there were credible reports that some students were prohibited from wearing headscarves at schools.

The Government states that it does not consider repression of persons suspected of extremism to be a matter of religious freedom, but of preventing armed resistance to the Government. Contrary to the previous reporting period, however, there were few reports that authorities were highly suspicious of those with more religiously observant behavior than average, such as frequent mosque attendance, bearded men, and veiled women. Nevertheless, reports suggest that law enforcement and national security officers actively monitored and reported on mosque activities and those of worshippers.

Some mosques continued to have difficulty registering. The Panjera mosque in Navoi, where approximately 500 persons meet for prayer on feast days, has been trying unsuccessfully for 7 years to register, as have several mosques in the southern and eastern Ferghana Valley, 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.

In Margilan, Ferghana Province, local government authorities appropriated and converted a madrassah built through private community contributions into a medical training facility, preventing its scheduled fall 2005 opening. Thus, the Government has prevented Ferghana Province, one of Uzbekistan's most populous and observantly Muslim areas, from having a madrassah to train imams. Similarly, the Government appropriated and converted a madrassah in Andijon into a hospital, despite petitions in 2004 by community members to have it reopened.

On October 20, 2005, authorities denied the pastor of Bethany Baptist Church in the Mirzo-Ulugbek district of Tashkent an additional appeal to keep his church open. This decision prolongs the local pastor's five-year quest to register the church.

On September 8, 2005, the economic court of Karakalpakstan rejected an appeal by the Emmanuel Church of Nukus to overturn the May 2005 MOJ decision to close the church, citing among other reasons, a charge that church members promoted Christianity to children without their parents' permission. Out of approximately twenty Protestant churches that had operated in the region, this was the last to close. 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. Forum 18 reported that on April 12, 2006, police and National Security Service (NSS) officials raided a service of Council Baptists at a member's home in the town of Kuvasai in Ferghana Province. Police reportedly interrogated three congregants, and on May 5, 2006, an Administrative Commission fined one congregant $8 (9,400 soum) for hosting the service in her home. On May 7, 2006, police and NSS officers reportedly returned to raid the church's Sunday service, recorded the names of those present, and threatened members with legal consequences if they did not register.

The International Church of Tashkent, a Protestant nondenominational church that ministers exclusively to Tashkent's international community, has tried unsuccessfully to obtain registration, but now holds services in an officially registered

Baptist church. The MOJ and the CRA have signaled a willingness to assist the International Church, but note that the law requires at least 100 congregants be citizens of Uzbekistan. The International Church meets regularly, without obstruction. However, the Government subjects many of its members to visa and accreditation delays.

Local authorities have continued to block the registration of evangelical Christian congregations, particularly those that attempt to minister to ethnic Uzbeks. In January 2005, congregants of the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik reported that the Department of Justice in Tashkent Region denied their church's registration application because of "grammatical errors in the Uzbek text of their charter." Authorities revoked without explanation the registration of a Baptist congregation in 2003; the last successful Baptist registration occurred in 1999. Despite a number of international appeals and formal legal appeals, the Mir (Peace) Church of Nukus, the Hushkhabar Church in Guliston, the Pentecostal Church in Andijon, and the Baptist Church in Gazalkent remained unregistered, apparently because they have ethnic Uzbek members. Church leaders reported that officials cite a multitude of reasons for refusing to register them, ranging from claims of falsified congregation lists to problems certifying addresses, "technicalities," and improper certification by fire inspectors, sanitation workers, and epidemiologists.

The Jehovah's Witnesses continued to try to register in Tashkent where city authorities have refused to approve the address of the congregation's place of worship. Out of the eleven Jehovah's Witnesses churches in the country, those in Chirchik and Ferghana remained the only registered congregations. In Ferghana, they continued to pursue a new legal address with a larger space because they continued to have difficulties renting space for larger meetings. In November 2005, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the Tashkent district office revoked its previous approval, which had allowed a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses to apply for registration after the local mahalla had blocked registration by refusing to approve the group's application. Many in the Government express suspicion of the Jehovah's Witnesses, viewing it as an extremist group.

Internal police training documents have listed the Jehovah's Witnesses, along with the terrorist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and HT, as security threats. Local officials and representatives of the religious establishment continued to express apprehension about the group's missionary activities. According to a Forum 18 report, CRA chairman Shoazim Minovarov specifically cited the Jehovah's Witnesses in a statement saying that the Government needed to take measures against proselytism.

There were reports that the MOJ, which administers accreditation for employees of NGOs, refused to accredit the administrative director of the Tashkent Institute of Asian Culture and Development and one of his staff members due to accusations of missionary activities. Proper accreditation, a necessity for anyone attempting to work in Uzbekistan, is controlled by the MOJ, which has the ability to force out, without bringing formal charges, those it believes are proselytizing.

In April 2006, after the Government levied administrative fines for improper registration of the Samarkand branch of an American-based education NGO, the organization and its U.S.-citizen volunteers closed and withdrew its staff. Members of the National Security Service and the local police had raided the volunteers' homes and confiscated personal literature and videos. Although the MOJ never charged the organization with proselytizing to local youths in English language clubs, the MOJ had announced it would conduct a detailed monitoring of them.

There were unconfirmed reports that the Government continues to monitor a Presbyterian church in Tashkent Oblast, visiting approximately every three months to discuss church activities, reiterating that proselytizing is illegal, and scrutinizing the pictures and names of new church members. The Government requires the church to file monthly reports on its activities.

In January 2005, authorities denied Russian Orthodox Church officials permission to bring relics of two Orthodox saints into the country. There were no similar reports during the period covered by this report.

Unlike previous years, there were no credible reports of heads of mahalla committees threatening converts that they would not be given a cemetery burial if they did not stop attending church.

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. Presumably because Christian materials, such as the New Testament and selected scripture readings, in the Uzbek language would make the faith more accessible to the ethnic Uzbek population, the CRA tries to restrict the publication and distribution of such materials, allowing some limited concessions and materials such as some Uzbek-lan-

guage coloring books with Bible themes. The Government requires the Bible Society to file regular reports on its printing, importing, and translating activities. The CRA apparently informally restricts the quantity of Uzbek-language materials that groups may import.

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), NSS, Customs Service, and police may suppress or confiscate religious literature of which they do not approve. The CRA, in accordance with the law, has given the right to publish, import, and distribute religious literature solely to registered central offices of religious organizations of which seven now exist: A nondenominational Bible society; the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan; two Islamic centers; and Russian Orthodox, Full Gospel, Baptist, and Roman Catholic offices. However, the Government uses bureaucratic obstacles, such as preventing registration of churches with Uzbek names on their membership rosters, and occasionally has blocked registered central religious organizations from producing or importing Christian literature in the Uzbek language, even though Bibles in many other languages are available in Tashkent bookstores.

The Government may confiscate and destroy illegally imported religious literature. Examples of this, reported by Forum 18, include: The seizure, reported in April 2006, of 126 religious videos from a member of the Pentecostal church traveling to Nukus; the confiscation of religious materials from a member of Jehovah's Witnesses during a raid of his apartment in Tashkent in August 2005; the seizure of fifteen Bibles from a Protestant pastor in Gulistan on June 17, 2005; and the confiscation of ninety Hare Krishna books from a devotee in a small town outside of Nukus in the same month. Although the CRA denies it, authorities often incinerate confiscated literature. On August 12, 2005, a Tashkent regional judge ordered the destruction of 33 Bibles, 160 copies of the Gospel of Mark, and approximately 600 Christian leaflets for children, all of which were printed in the Uzbek language. Authorities had seized the literature outside of Tashkent on July 20, 2005, from a group of four Baptists whom authorities subsequently detained and interrogated for eight hours.

The Uzbekistan 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 entrance into Uzbekistan of both Christian and Muslim titles.

Access to Muslim publications is also tightly controlled by the State, which 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 very small number of works in Arabic, imported from abroad, is sometimes available from book dealers. More controversial literature, if being offered, is not displayed, but only available upon request. Possession of literature by authors deemed to be extremists may lead to arrest and prosecution. The Government categorically prohibits HT leaflets.

Previously, in March 2005, members of a Tashkent-based Baptist church reported that police confiscated over 1,000 CRA-approved religious booklets and detained seven church members for questioning. In August 2004, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported that authorities detained a member and confiscated religious literature. In February 2004, according to press reports, police in Karakalpakstan confiscated religious literature from a Jehovah's Witness in Nukus. In January 2004, police searched the home of a Jehovah's Witnesses member in Jizzakh and confiscated religious literature.

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 directed at three types of Muslims: Alleged Wahhabists, in particular those 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 (UNHCR) on March 15, 2006; those suspected of being involved in the 1999 Tashkent bombings or of being in-

volved with the IMU, a Namangan-rooted group on the U.S. list of international terrorist organizations; and suspected members of the extremist Islamic political party HT. 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 has physically mistreated or tortured hundreds, perhaps thousands over the years. Persons accused of involvement with HT, which often involved nothing more than having attended one of its meetings or passing along banned HT leaflets, continued to be subject to prison sentences of up to fifteen, sometimes twenty years.

Authorities appeared to suspect individuals belonging to Islamic organizations and Muslims who meet privately to pray or study Islam of extremism. People accused of "Wahhabism" faced abuse ranging from job loss to physical abuse and long imprisonment.

The Government branded the Islamic missionary group Tabligh Jamoat ("Outreach Society") as extremist. The group's worship, dress, and grooming practices are in accordance with their interpretation of Islamic practice during Muhammad's time. Various religious experts assert that there is no indication that Tabligh Jamoat seeks to overthrow the regime; members claim to be exclusively religious and apolitical. There were several reports that regional leaders have appeared on local television channels stating that schoolchildren may not attend mosques, and in Bukhara, there was a report that police have not allowed schoolchildren into the mosque.

In March 2005 Radio Liberty reported a trial of six Tabligh Jamoat members; four were amnestied and two were fined. In January 2005 a Tashkent court took the unusual action of granting amnesty to seven of eight Tabligh Jamoat members on trial for extremism. This immediately followed a number of cases between July and December 2004 in the Ferghana Valley: The November 2004 sentencing of two followers to six-month terms, four of which were credited as time served, and the October 2004 sentencing of eleven members to five-year prison terms in Andijon.

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 July 25, 2005, the Tashkent criminal court convicted three alleged Akromiya members Akhad Ziyodkhojayev, Bokhodir Karimov, and Abdubosid Zakirov of participation in a religious extremist group, conspiracy to overthrow the constitutional order, establishing a criminal group, and disseminating materials constituting a threat to public order. The three received sentences of 15.5 to 16 years imprisonment. Trial observers noted that the convictions were based almost entirely on defendants' confessions and witness testimony, and that evidence presented in court did not suggest that the defendants were involved in criminal activity. In March 2005 a Syrdarya court sentenced seven food vendors from the town of Bakht to prison sentences of eight to nine years based on their alleged membership in Akromiya, though their families claimed their convictions were based on coerced testimony.

In May 2005 peaceful demonstrations in support of twenty-three alleged Akromiya members led to civil unrest in Andijon. On the evening of May 12, 2005, an unknown number of individuals, possibly supporters of the men facing trial, attacked a police garrison, seized weapons, and broke into a nearby prison and released several hundred inmates. On the evening of May 13, according to several witnesses, military vehicles drove into Bobur Square, where several thousand civilians had gathered, and fired indiscriminately into the crowd multiple times and without warning. The total number of dead as a result was estimated from 170 to more than 700. In subsequent public statements, the Government referred to all on trial, in prison, and those killed on May 13 as religious extremists. By the end of the reporting period, approximately 257 individuals had been convicted of various charges, including Islamic extremism, murder, terrorism, and anti-constitutional activity in connection with the Andijon events.

Following the terrorist attacks of March, April and July 2004, the Government detained at least 500 persons, the overwhelming majority of whom were accused of membership in HT or Wahhabi groups. The Government also detained relatives of persons already in jail on charges of extremism. The Government released the majority of those taken into custody after questioning; some detainees made credible allegations of torture. The court convicted all eighty-five of those charged in connection with the terrorist acts, sentencing them to prison terms ranging from three to eighteen years.

Authorities often severely mistreat persons arrested on suspicion of extremism, using torture, beatings, and particularly harsh prison conditions, typically sentencing these individuals to between seven- and twelve-year terms, though some defendants, particularly those also accused of involvement with HT or terrorist activity, received sentences of up to twenty years. Prison authorities reportedly do not

allow many prisoners suspected of Islamic extremism to practice their religion freely and, in some circumstances, do not allow them to own a Qur'an. Prison authorities often do not permit inmates to pray five times a day or to adjust work and meal schedules for the Ramadan fast. Last year, authorities reportedly punished inmates who attempted to fulfill their religious obligations against prison rules or who protested the rules, with solitary confinement and beatings. This year, as authorities did not allow visits by independent outside monitors to places of detention, there was no reliable way of verifying whether such punishments took place.

During the period of this report, there were two allegations of deaths in detention. According to human rights activists, on May 1, 2006, thirty-four-year-old Kakhramon Teshaboyev died in a Tashkent prison medical facility, four years after he was convicted and sentenced to eighteen years in prison on charges of anti-constitutional activity and membership in a criminal organization. Authorities reportedly delivered Teshaboyev's body to his family and pressured them to bury it as soon as possible. A local imam died within three days of his September 14, 2005, sentencing after allegedly receiving injections of an unknown substance while in prison. His family requested an investigation into the imam's death, but no such investigation had taken place by the end of the reporting period. In March 2004 Abdurrahman Narzaullayev, a convicted religious extremist serving a sixteen-year sentence in Karshi prison, died of a pulmonary infection after prison authorities allegedly attempted to break his hunger strike by force-feeding him. Although specific information is difficult to obtain, human rights and other observers maintain that prisoners frequently die of diseases directly related to the conditions of their confinement.

On September 24, 2004, the Supreme Court issued a decree definitively banning the use of evidence obtained by torture or other illegal means. The Government has since taken limited administrative steps to eliminate torture in detention, but there were numerous reports that such treatment remains routine and systematic.

There were no new developments in the following cases: The February 2005 case in which two followers of Sufi Islam were given six-year sentences while claiming that authorities planted HT leaflets on them during their arrest and tortured them; the internationally monitored October 2004 convictions of twenty-three alleged extremists in which witnesses and defendants stated that police extracted their testimonies through torture; or the October 2004 conviction on criminal charges of the imam of a Navoi mosque and sixteen members, in which the defendants admitted only to being adherents of Islam.

In May 2004 members of the security services allegedly abducted Husnuddin Nazarov while on his way to evening prayer services; according to Nazarov's family, authorities are holding him in detention at an undisclosed location. Husnuddin Nazarov is the eldest son of Imam Abidkhan Nazarov, an influential religious figure in Tashkent who was dismissed from his position at the Tokhtabay mosque in 1995, fled to Kazakhstan, and was resettled as a refugee by the UNHCR in March 2006. Imam Nazarov's followers were principal targets of the Government's effort to end extremism. Several of the Imam's followers were deported from Kazakhstan in late November 2005. Most were tried, convicted, and sentenced to an average of six years imprisonment on charges of Islamic extremism, while one defendant, Rukhitdin Fakhrutdinov, was awaiting trial at the end of the reporting period.

Authorities often harass or arrest family members of persons wanted in connection with Islamic political activities or already jailed in connection with those activities. Though there are exceptions, in many cases the relative's only crime is association.

Authorities continued to detain women for participating in or organizing demonstrations demanding the release of male relatives jailed on suspicion of Islamic extremism. On April 20, 2006, authorities arrested and charged six women with possession and dissemination of HT materials, according to Andijon television reports. Authorities claimed that 300 leaflets, 100 books, 100 magazines, and other media were confiscated from the homes of the women, who lived in different towns in Andijon Province.

Authorities usually hold most detained women for a short period of time, releasing them with an administrative fine after a short period of time, and driving them home. There were reports that police insulted or forced some women to remove their head coverings. Although the police generally did not arrest women simply for taking part in demonstrations, many Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) offices maintained a list of women who participated in protests and detained many for questioning in the aftermath of the March, April, and July 2004 bombings. According to the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Activists of Uzbekistan, in December 2004, authorities amnestied four women who had been charged with anti-

constitutional activity, possession of banned religious materials, and religious extremism.

On April 19, 2006, the Tashkent Province Criminal Court convicted eight men from the town of Yangiyul on charges of membership in an unregistered religious organization and sentenced seven of them to three years of compulsory labor in addition to paying 20 percent of their earnings to the state during that time. The court sentenced the eighth man to two years in prison. Prosecutors initially charged the men with membership in a banned extremist organization, which would have carried a maximum penalty of fifteen years imprisonment; however, for unspecified reasons, prosecutors reduced the charges while the trial was in progress. Observers reported that prosecutors may have reduced the charges in part because the evidence rested entirely upon testimony by a convicted thief, and that other court testimony did not indicate that the defendants were involved in any illegal activity. The defendants testified that investigators had beaten them and subjected them to other forms of physical mistreatment and threats of violence in detention. The judge disregarded the testimony regarding torture, saying that the men had made the allegations to avoid responsibility for their crimes. Family members of defendants reported that law enforcement officers threatened them with violence and harassed them during the investigation and trial.

There were continued reports from human rights activists that prison officials beat and isolated prisoners convicted of extremism who refused to sign letters renouncing what the authorities deemed religious extremism, or who refused to accept visiting imams' moderate interpretations of Islam. In April 2005, courts sentenced nine persons convicted of religious extremism to prison terms ranging from six to thirteen years, amid allegations that law-enforcement officials tortured them to provoke confessions. On January 20, 2005, in Tashkent City Court, authorities accused eight Muslims of using and distributing banned Islamic audio recordings.

As in previous years, there were reports that police planted narcotics, ammunition, and religious leaflets on citizens to justify their arrests. According to human rights activists, the police arrested many of those with outward signs of religious observance, such as traditional clothing or beards. There were also reports that authorities tortured, and beat evangelical Christians or failed to punish community members who did so. In June 2005 police arrested a Pentecostal Christian in Tashkent and reportedly tortured him in an attempt to force him to abandon Christianity. In April 2005 Forum 18 reported that authorities failed to respond to Christian convert Khaldibek Primbetov's complaint that his neighbors in Karakalpakstan had beaten him and told him to "return to Islam" or leave the village. In June 2004 Forum 18 reported that an NSS officer in Khorezm questioned two members of an unregistered Baptist church and beat one of the men. Local authorities denied the allegations.

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 which were reportedly increased from five to ten times the minimum wage to fifty to one-hundred times the minimum wage.

During the reporting year, the Government also harassed Christians in the Andijon area. Forum 18 reported on June 20, 2006, that a Protestant pastor from Andijon, Dmitry Shestakov, leader of a registered Full Gospel Pentecostal congregation, went into hiding for fear of arrest. He faces between ten and twenty years in prison if found guilty of treason charges.

As in previous years, there were several allegations that Christian evangelicals were detained. Even if they are not taken into custody, pastors who conduct unauthorized religious services still run the risk of arrest, which can have an effect on their activities. There was a report that on February 7, 2006, authorities fined five members of the "Gen-Khyan" Presbyterian Church, including the church's pastor, for congregating without proper registration of their religious organization. Local officials continued to harass Bakhtiyor Tuychiyev, the ethnic Uzbek pastor of a Full Gospel Pentecostal church in Andijon. He has tried unsuccessfully to register his church since 2002. In November 2005 there were reports that the local authorities interrogated the pastor, and on December 23, 2005, that unidentified assailants attacked him, reviling him as a "traitor to the faith."

On August 10, 2005, a criminal court in Navoi convicted a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, Azim Klichev, of teaching religion without government authorization and fined him approximately $70 (78,350 soum), ten times the minimum monthly wage. A local appeals court later upheld the decision. On August 30 a criminal court in Karshi convicted members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Bakhrom Pulatov and Feruza Mamatova, of conducting illegal religious meetings and proselytizing. Authorities fined Pulatov approximately $640 (705,150 soum), or 90 times the minimum month-

ly wage, and Mamatova approximately $500 (548,450 soum), seventy times the minimum monthly wage. The fines, although within the amount the law prescribed, were far beyond that normally imposed for religious crimes. A local appeals court upheld the decisions.

In May 2005 authorities detained and questioned 20 of the 125 members of an unregistered Baptist church in the Surkhandarya Region. Also in 2005 authorities detained and administratively punished six parishioners of Bethany Baptist congregation in Tashkent for unregistered activity. In June 2005 police reportedly arrested two Baptist pastors and four church members after raiding their Tashkent church. In 2005 courts sentenced Baptist Farkhod Khamedov to ten days of administrative punishment, but authorities disciplined law enforcement officers in connection with his treatment. In October 2004 a district court in Tashkent fined a Baptist pastor $65 (65,000 soum) for unregistered religious activity. In 2003 authorities imprisoned and fined Baptists in Khalkabad for worshiping privately, and fined a Baptist pastor in Urgench for allegedly conducting religious work among children without their parents' permission.

Authorities continued to raid other Christian denominations as well. On September 23, 2005, according to Forum 18 reports, authorities arrested sixteen Baptists from the Council of Churches who were conducting an evangelistic meeting in Kagan outside of Bukhara, and detained them for a day. Authorities also confiscated the Baptists' Christian literature, including Gospels in the Uzbek language. On April 21, 2006, in the Shaikhantahur District of Tashkent, Government authorities arrested three members of the Jesus Christ Charismatic Church who were engaged in humanitarian activities at a children's hospital. Although the authorities later released them, the prosecutor is carrying out a criminal investigation on one member for teaching religion.

During the period of this report, the Government particularly targeted Full Gospel churches. Forum 18 reported an incident involving a member of the Full Gospel Church in Syrdarya in which authorities summoned Andrei Li to court on April 7, 2006. The court completed the proceedings without his knowledge and convicted him and fined him approximately $42 (50,400 soum) for illegal religious activity. Authorities fined the Fores Full Gospel pastor from Tashkent approximately $4 (4800 soum) after Government authorities raided his home while fifteen members of his church arrived to celebrate the holidays on January 11, 2006. On November 14, 2005, authorities arrested the pastor of the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Jizzak, who faced charges of "participation in the activity of an illegal religious organization" and possible imprisonment of up to three years, after raiding his home in October 2005, when other members of his congregation had met for dinner.

Additionally, in June 2005, authorities took into custody approximately twenty Full Gospel Pentecostal Church members in Tashkent; several credible media outlets reported that authorities verbally and physically abused, and threatened to rape, the members during several days of interrogations. Under the guise of the murder investigation of an American citizen who belonged to the church, Government authorities harassed church members for allowing ethnic Uzbeks into their congregation. Internet websites reported that on April 30, 2006, 160 congregants from the formerly sanctioned Emmanuel Full Gospel Church in Nukus were celebrating Easter in a local hotel when approximately 50 policemen stormed the premises, arresting at least 8 individuals, including the pastor. During the raid, Government officers threatened many of the children into signing statements renouncing their faith while parents faced similar pressure to discourage their family's involvement with the church. After hours of questioning, the eight church members were released without charges or fines. In a related incident, also on April 30, 2006, local police officers attacked the caretaker of the land owned by the church, beating him and breaking his arm, in an attempt to intimidate leaders of the Full Gospel church to relinquish the property to the Government.

On April 24, 2006, numerous press reports indicated that Urgench City criminal investigators raided the home of the pastor of the Union of Independent Churches as twelve of his congregants met for lunch. Investigators seized the pastor's computer and Christian literature, along with another member's digital camera and laptop. The pastor and one church member faced administrative charges for allegations of proselytizing. The Government deported three Turkmen citizens present during the police raid, and reportedly prohibited them from returning by placing black stamps in their passports. On April 11, 2006, Government authorities raided a local Protestant's apartment while she was meeting with two other church members. Authorities took all three members along with one small child to Tashkent's Yunusobod District police headquarters, where officers attempted to force them to sign confessions of illegal religious activity. They refused and, after several hours, were eventually released.

In October 2004 police disrupted services of an unregistered Christian denomination in Tashkent and questioned several dozen members. In September 2004 authorities disrupted a prayer meeting of the Greater Grace Church in Samarkand, confiscated literature, and forced members to sign confessions. When the pastor traveled abroad, the Government warned him not to return and threatened him and his family. In March 2004 a criminal court fined six members of a Protestant church in Tashkent for holding unauthorized meetings in a private home. In August 2003 Nukus police raided the Peace Protestant Church and fined two church leaders for holding illegal religious services. According to Forum 18, in September 2003, police in Chirchik disrupted Sunday services of the unregistered Friendship Protestant Church.

In October 2004 a Surkhandarya court fined Pentecostal Pastor Bakhrom Nazarov $312 (326,500 soum) for proselytizing; police had earlier raided the homes of Nazarov's relatives, without identifying themselves, and confiscated Christian literature. In July 2004 a Termez court sentenced Nazarov to ten days in prison and fined ten members of his church $5 to $31 (5,440 to 32,680 soum).

Although the authorities tolerate the existence of many Christian evangelical groups, they enforce the law's ban on proselytizing. The Government often monitors and harasses those who openly try to convert Muslims to Christianity. Jehovah's Witnesses have come under particular scrutiny. On December 12, 2005, two Jehovah's Witnesses were sentenced to several days' imprisonment and nine others were fined $11 (13,200 soum) for unauthorized religious activity. Also during the period covered by this report, a Member of Jehovah's Witnesses faced prosecution for proselytizing in the western city of Navoi. The church member was charged with attempting to convert a believer from one religious group to another. He was convicted on October 6, 2005, and fined approximately $77 (92,400 soum). On August 31, 2005, two Jehovah's Witnesses were fined a total of more than $1,300 (1,320,000 soum) for illegal religious activity. This was the largest fine levied on Christians by the Government in recent history. On August 10, 2005, courts convicted a member of Jehovah's Witnesses from Prigovor (near Navoi) of providing unauthorized religion instruction and fined him $44 (52,800 soum), as Forum 18 reported. In September 2004, courts charged Jehovah's Witnesses member Dilshod Akhmedov with proselytizing, but authorities later dropped the charges. In July 2004 one member was detained for distributing religious literature, but the court in Takhiatash quickly closed the case. In December 2003, two members of Jehovah's Witnesses in Karshi were arrested while preaching door-to-door.

On May 29, 2006, authorities deported a member of Jehovah's Witnesses to Kazakhstan. On April 27, 2006, authorities arrested and sentenced a member of Jehovah's Witnesses to 10 days in prison for illegal religious activity. On April 12, 2006, authorities coordinated country-wide raids of homes of Jehovah's Witnesses during their annual holy day, which commemorates the death of Jesus, and detained more than 500 people. Reports claimed that authorities beat some members and threatened women with rape or other humiliating acts unless they signed confession statements. Most of those arrested were released within a day, several with administrative fines. Following these prosecutions, on April 26, a Russian citizen traveled to the country to represent Jehovah's Witnesses facing trial. Authorities detained him at Tashkent airport, then denied him entry and deported him. The Witnesses then sent an Uzbek citizen attorney to Karshi to defend members on trial. On May 22, while in court working, authorities sent him to a cell and detained him for more than twenty-four hours.

In June 2005 the Karshi city prosecutor filed criminal charges against three Jehovah's Witnesses in Karshi for proselytizing, meeting as an unregistered group, and distributing banned religious materials. In March 2005, on the same liturgical occasion as the April 2006 raids, authorities carried out a similar coordinated raid against Jehovah's Witnesses meetings in Tashkent and eight other cities, arresting approximately 200 church members and releasing most soon afterwards, but subjecting some to longer detention, police beatings, and small fines. In January 2005, authorities raided an unauthorized Jehovah's Witnesses religious meeting in Karshi and questioned forty-two members. Courts sentenced two members to ten days in prison and fined seven more.

In 2004 police fined two Jehovah's Witnesses in Kogon $10 (10,900 soum) and $13 (14,170 soum) respectively for allegedly conducting illegal religious teaching. Also in 2004, authorities sentenced Jehovah's Witness Vladimir Kushchevoy of Samarkand to three years of corrective labor, later reduced to one year probation, for providing unauthorized religious instruction, and in June 2004, in Uchkuduk, detained Jehovah's Witnesses member Tolkin Hankildiev and fined him $26 (27,200 soum).

Credible reports alleged that authorities arrested two Baptist pastors and four church members in June 2005, after plainclothes police officers raided their church

in Tashkent. In May 2005 authorities detained and questioned 20 of the 125 members of the unregistered Baptist church in Surkhandarya Province. In March 2005 police raided an unauthorized Protestant meeting involving citizens and South Korean missionaries outside Tashkent; the citizens were fined.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 website remains unblocked by the Government and he continues to host a popular radio program on Islam and to teach at the Islamic University.

Authorities have allowed a small but growing 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 note that the atmosphere in the Muslim community has improved somewhat, as observant Muslims are being allowed to practice their faith within these controlled environments.

During the year covered in this report, the number of Hajj pilgrims increased from 4,200 to 5,000.

The Government continued to respect the military pacifism of Jehovah's Witnesses. The draft board routinely gave exemptions.

On April 30, 2005, an official at the MVD confirmed reports that authorities disciplined a Chilonzor District inspector in connection with a case involving actions taken against Baptist members Flyura Valitova and Farkhod Khamedov (see above).

In March 2006, the Government completed the annual year-end amnesty of an indeterminate number of prisoners of conscience from the 2005–2006 amnesty, the vast majority of whom had been convicted of Islamic extremism. This followed an amnesty in 2004–2005 of 361, as well as the 2003–2004 amnesty of 704 such prisoners. Imams met with amnestied prisoners convicted of extremism upon their return to their communities.

During the period covered by this report, there continued to be increased tolerance in general for the use of head coverings by Muslim women. The hijab was seen more frequently in Tashkent, the more religiously conservative parts of the Ferghana Valley, and the southern provinces of Kashkadarya and Surkhondarya. The CRA has taken the position that women should not be barred from educational institutions on the basis of their religious dress and has actively assisted women who have been previously expelled to gain re-admission to their universities. The CRA's support of the re-admission of these women may be attributed to the January 2005 UN Human Rights Committee decision in favor of an Uzbek woman whom the Tashkent State Institute for Eastern Languages had expelled in 1999 in connection with her wearing of the hijab. In response to the woman's petition, the committee found that the Government had violated her rights under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. During the period covered by this report, it was more common to see women on the street wearing the hijab and, less frequently, the veil.

Authorities gave Greater Grace Church in Samarkand a permit to meet once a week as a congregation in a Korean Church, as well as in people's homes. At Christmas, authorities permitted the youth choral group to present a concert for the public Children's home.

There have been reports of some recent cases where authorities have dismissed charges against Protestants after their lawyer protested procedural matters or evidence. For example, the Urtachirchik district court in Tashkent Province tried to bring charges against two members of the Pentecostal church for teaching religion. On May 15, 2006, the court dropped the case. Likewise, on May 5, 2006, the Gulistan district court dropped the administrative case of a member of the Evangelical Charismatic Church, releasing her from punishment.

On January 21, 2006, the court also intervened on behalf of four ethnic-Uzbek students whom the Nukus Pediatric Medical Institute expelled from student housing for "promoting Christianity among fellow students." Reports indicate that all students are back in the institute's housing.

On January 7, 2006, the civil court of Tashkent city in the Mirabad district dismissed the case against a volunteer of the Uzbekistan Bible Society. On January 6, 2006, in Termez city, the court ruled illegal the January 1, 2006 detention of the

pastor of an unregistered Pentecostal church and confiscation of his car, releasing him and the car.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

There was no pattern of discrimination against Jewish persons. 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. The diminished numbers make it impossible to attain the provisions of the 1998 revised religion laws, which require registration of eight synagogues in eight different cities in order to establish a rabbinate. The chief rabbi continues to press the Government unsuccessfully to allow for an exception. There are Jewish kindergartens in Tashkent and Samarkand officially teaching Jewish "culture." In the past, HT members have distributed anti-Semitic fliers with text generally originating abroad and not representative of feelings of the vast majority of the population; there were no reports of such fliers being distributed in the current reporting period. Although the religious press carried initial stories speculating on anti-Semitic motives for the February 25, 2006 death from head injuries of a Tashkent Jewish community leader, Avraam Yagudayev; as well as the June 8, 2006 murders of a twenty-year-old secretary to prominent Tashkent-based Rabbi David Gurevich, Karina Loifer and her mother, preliminary investigation did not indicate that anti-Semitism motivated these deaths. The investigations were ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

Society generally tolerated Christians, provided they did not actively proselytize and were not converted ethnic Uzbeks, who suffer discrimination. Evangelical Christian churches and churches with ethnic Uzbek converts encounter difficulties stemming from discrimination.

On December 5, 2005, an article entitled "Our Faith is Not for Sale" appeared in a weekly newspaper. Its author passionately denounced missionary activities, characterizing missionaries as dangerous and subversive. Implicit was the notion that missionaries are working on behalf of foreign governments hostile to Central Asia Muslims. At least one Tashkent-based imam applauded the sentiments voiced in the article and urged his congregation to read 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. The U.S. embassy actively engages in monitoring religious freedom issues and maintains contact with numerous sectors of society including government and religious leaders, academicians, think-tank experts, and human rights advocates. High-level executive branch officials met with Uzbek officials abroad and in the country during the period covered by this report, and expressed strong concerns regarding human rights, including the U.S. stance on freedom of religious expression.

The U.S. ambassador and other embassy officials met with local religious leaders, human rights activists, and country officials to discuss specific issues of human rights and religious freedom. Officials in Washington met on several occasions with embassy officials of the country to convey U.S. concerns regarding religious freedom. U.S. officials traveled around the country meeting with religious leaders and groups as well as with government officials. Embassy officials maintain contact with the CRA, as well as with religious leaders and human rights activists. When the embassy learned of difficulties faced by religious groups, it intervened on their behalf when possible as in the past, taking such actions as attempting to contact Government officials and attending trials. These actions were for observant Muslims and Christians, and faith-based foreign aid organizations. All but two of the approximately fifty Jehovah's Witnesses detained in Tashkent's Chilonzor District on March 24, 2005 were released within hours, a fact they credited to the embassy's presence. The embassy continues to raise concerns, despite a downturn in our bilateral relationship with Uzbekistan.

The ambassador and other embassy officials met with numerous Muslim clergymen and other religious figures. Members of the religious community, as well as other Uzbek opinion leaders, routinely receive information from the embassy's Information Resource Center. Outreach events included visits by the ambassador and embassy officials to mosques and madrassahs. 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 Gov-

ernment 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. sponsors exchange and educational programs that are specifically designed to promote religious tolerance and to expand religious freedom. Since 2004, the Community Connections and Cultural and Religious Pluralism projects, programs conducted in cooperation with the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), brought eighty local Islamic leaders to the United States. A three-year Comparative Religious Studies Program, funded by the U.S. Government and managed by the University of Washington, provides for exchange of experts and professors from five local universities in order to promote religious tolerance.

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. In 2006, the U.S. Government sponsored training in three cities in Uzbekistan for defense advocates and human rights activists on international religious freedom standards, as well as a follow-up roundtable, and a regional conference in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on the role of religion in promoting peace and social partnerships, which included religious leaders from Uzbekistan. In 2005, the U.S. Government sponsored the participation of an Uzbek specialist on human rights in the International Summer School on Religion and Public Life in Jerusalem. In 2006, the U.S. Government sponsored Uzbeks' participation in the "Law, Religion and Social Change" conference at the National University in Canberra, Australia.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 170 square miles and a population of 77,000. Seventy-four percent of the population was Christian. The Anglican Church was the largest religious denomination, accounting for an estimated 26 percent of the population. The Methodist, Moravian, and Roman Catholic churches accounted for approximately 10 percent each. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that included most independent evangelical churches, claimed an estimated 25 percent of the population, and Jehovah's Witnesses numbered more than 1,000 members. The total number of non-Christians was small; they included an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Rastafarians, more than 200 adherents of Islam, nearly 200 Hindus, and approximately 50 members of the Baha'i Faith. According to the 2001census report, there were more than 4,000 atheists or persons who did 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.

Ministers of religion are constitutionally prohibited from running for elected office.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, groups are required to incorporate to own property. Tax and duty-free concessions, especially for building and development, are available to groups that are registered.

Public schools are secular; religious education is not part of their curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, an aspect of their religious ritual, is prohibited. Rastafarian representatives met with the prime minister in 2004 and submitted a petition to decriminalize the use of marijuana; however, no known changes to existing laws were made 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The Antigua Christian Council conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

Rastafarians complained of widespread 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.

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. In October 2005, following complaints from some non-Roman Catholic Christian groups, the Government eased the requirements for registration of religious groups.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,068,302 square miles and a population of approximately thirty-seven million, according to the 2001 census. Accurate estimates of religious affiliation were difficult to obtain; however, information supplied by the National Registry of Worship and representatives of various religious groups, as well as statistics from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), produced the following estimates, which do not necessarily imply active religious practice: Catholics, 70 percent of the population; Protestants, 9 percent; Muslims, 1.5 percent; Jews, 0.8 percent; other religious groups, 2.5 percent; and the remainder, no declared religious affiliation. Available estimates often were based on outdated census data and questionable presumptions, such as assuming that immigrants of Middle Eastern origin were Muslim. The Islamic Center estimated that only one of three Middle Eastern immigrants was Muslim, particularly those of Syrian or Lebanese origin; the majority of these immigrants were Maronites (Orthodox Catholic). Of the Muslim population of 500,000 to 600,000, the Islamic Center estimated that 93 percent were Sunni and 7 percent Shiite.

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 federal government "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith," and the Government provides the Catholic Church with a variety of subsidies not available to other religious groups. These subsidies, estimated at approximately four million dollars per annum, have been described as compensation for expropriation of properties that belonged to Catholic institutions in the colonial era. The Secretariat of Worship in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International

Trade, and Worship is responsible for conducting the Government's relations with religious organizations in the country.

The National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), an independent government agency under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, is charged with promoting social and cultural pluralism and combating discriminatory attitudes. INADI, which includes representatives of the major religious groups on its board, investigates violations of a 1988 law that prohibits discrimination based on "race, religion, nationality, ideology, political opinion, sex, economic position, social class, or physical characteristics." The agency also conducts educational programs, supports victims, and promotes proactive measures to prevent discrimination. In 2005 INADI released its national plan against discrimination, providing an analysis of the situation and discriminatory social practices as well as strategic recommendations to address the identified problems, including religious discrimination.

Three Christian holy days are observed as national holidays: Good Friday, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. Legislation passed in April 2006 extended authorized paid leave from three days to seven for those observing the Jewish holy days of New Year, the Days of Atonement, and Passover, and also for those observing the Islamic holy days of the Muslim New Year.

Religious organizations that wish to obtain tax-exempt status must register with the Secretariat of Worship and report periodically to maintain their status. Possession of a place of worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy are among the criteria the secretariat considers in determining whether to grant or withdraw registration. In October 2005 the Government relaxed the restrictions, granting registration to groups that formerly did not meet the necessary requirements, including the Amerindian mbyá guaraní, signifying the first instance in which the Government officially recognized an indigenous religion.

Registration is not required for private religious services, such as those conducted in homes, but it is necessary for public activities.

Registered religious organizations may bring in foreign missionaries by applying to the Secretariat of Worship, which in turn notifies immigration authorities so that appropriate documents may be issued. There were no reports from any groups that their affiliated foreign missionaries were denied visas.

Public education is secular; however, students may request instruction in the religion of their choice, which can be conducted in school or at a religious institution. Many churches and synagogues operate private schools, including seminaries and universities.

The 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 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.) The Vatican refused to remove the bishop, and at the end of the period covered by this report, the bishop remained nominally in his position but was not providing any of the services or duties of the office, and the Government had removed its subsidies.

Jewish authorities expressed their concern over a judge's decision, in apparent contradiction of nondiscrimination laws, that a landlord could refuse to rent an apartment to a Jewish couple because of the landlord's fear of a possible (terrorist) attack. INADI issued a determination that the judge's decision violated antidiscrimination laws. The Delegation of Israeli Argentine Associations (DAIA) appealed the judge's decision and was considering requesting the judge's removal from the bench.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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. Cooperation was particularly notable between FEARAB (Latin America), representing Muslims and Christians of Arab origin; the Islamic Center of the Republic of Argentina; and DAIA to prevent religious tensions stemming from political conflicts in the Middle East.

The DAIA reported an increase in anti-Semitic comments and graffiti. DAIA also noted its concern over increased receipt by individuals of threatening and anti-Semitic e-mails, although they attributed this activity to individuals rather than any organized group.

SECTION IV. U.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 questions of religious freedom.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 13,939 square miles and a population of approximately 340,000, including those residing in the country illegally. The country was ethnically diverse and included a Haitian minority of legal and illegal immigrants estimated at 40,000 to 60,000 persons and a white/European minority nearly as large.

More than 90 percent of the population professed a religion, and anecdotal evidence suggested that most attended services regularly. The country's religious profile reflected this diversity. Protestant Christian denominations, including Baptists (35 percent), Anglicans (15 percent), Presbyterians, Methodists, evangelicals, and Seventh-day Adventists were in the majority, but there were also significant Roman Catholic (14 percent) and Greek Orthodox populations. Smaller Jewish, Baha'i, and Muslim communities also were active. A small number of Bahamians and Haitians, particularly those living in the Family Islands, practiced Obeah, a version of voodoo. A small but stable number of citizens identified themselves as Rastafarians, while some members of the country's small resident Guyanese and Indian populations practiced Hinduism and other South Asian religions. Although many unaffiliated Protestant congregations were almost exclusively Black, most mainstream churches were 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 requires the Government to guarantee respect for Christian values, and there is often reference to the country's strong Christian heritage and

Christian themes in general in political and public discourse. The constitution specifically forbids infringement of a person's freedom to change religion.

Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Whit Monday are national holidays.

Churches and other religious congregations do not face any special registration requirements, although they must incorporate legally to purchase land. There are no legal provisions to encourage or discourage the formation of religious communities, which are required to pay the same tariffs and stamp taxes as for-profit companies once they legally incorporate.

The Government permits foreign clergy and missionaries to enter the country and to proselytize and practice their religion without restriction.

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 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.

The Government meets regularly with religious leaders, both publicly and privately, to discuss social, political, and economic concerns. Christian pastors exerted significant influence over politics and society.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

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 three months' imprisonment.

Some Rastafarians claimed discrimination by the Government, citing forced cutting of hair, police harassment, and unequal treatment of Rastafarian students. In August 2005 police raided the Ethiopia Africa Black International Congress True Church of Divine Salvation during a Rastafarian religious service, disrupting the ceremony, demonstrating a lack of respect for church practices and sanctuary, and briefly detaining worshippers.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There were several interdenominational organizations and ecumenical movements. These groups freely expressed their opinions on social, political, and economic topics.

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.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

BARBADOS

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 166 square miles and a population of approximately 277,000. More than 95 percent of the population was considered Christian, although persons may not have been active in any particular denomination. The Anglican Church constituted the largest religious group, with approximately 70,000 members; an estimated 65 percent were active in the Church. The next largest denomination was the Seventh-day Adventists, numbering approximately 16,000 members, 10,000 of whom were active. There were approximately 11,000 Roman Catholics; an estimated 20 percent were active. Pentecostals numbered approximately 7,000; more than 50 percent were active. Methodists numbered an estimated 5,000, according to church officials, although many more claimed Methodist affiliation in the previous official census; an estimated 60 percent of members were active. There were approximately 2,500 members of Jehovah's Witnesses; more than 95 percent were active. Baptists, Moravians, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) were present in small numbers.

The number of non-Christians was small. There were an estimated 2,700 Muslims, most of whom were 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 approximately 200 Barbadians, comprised the rest of the growing Muslim community. There were three mosques and an Islamic center. Other minority religious groups included 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. These were obtained easily, and there were no other special requirements imposed to acquire them.

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.

Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, pertinent to their religious rituals, is illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring. No new developments were reported concerning complaints that in March 2005, following a prison riot, prison officials shaved the dreadlocks of Rastafarian prisoners after the discovery of contraband in the hair of some members of that religious group. Likewise, no new developments were noted regarding the Rastafarian community's request for government assistance in setting up a primary school, on the grounds that the government schools instilled beliefs in Rastafarian children that conflicted with their faith.

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

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

The Barbados Christian Council and the Caribbean Conference of Churches conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith.

Representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventist, and Muslim communities stated that they experienced occasional criticism for their religious be-

liefs and practices, but they generally believed that society was very tolerant. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 8,867 square miles and a population estimated at 290,000. There was 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) included Europeans, East Indians, Chinese, Arabs, and North Americans.

According to a 2000 census, Roman Catholics constituted 49.6 percent of the population, Pentecostals 7.4 percent, and Anglicans 5.3 percent. Other faiths and denominations included Baptists (3.5 percent), Methodists (3.5 percent), Seventh†day Adventists (5.2 percent), and Mennonites (4.1 percent). There were 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 minority groups tended to live in Belize City. Catholics were numerous throughout the country and constituted the majority faith in all but two of the country's six districts, Belize and Cayo, where they held a plurality of the population but did not constitute a majority. Approximately 10 percent of citizens identified 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 reads that "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 twelve 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 traditional 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 that "no such community shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for persons of that community." Although there is no state religion, the educational system maintains by statute a strong religious curriculum. The curriculum ties "spirituality" with social studies courses. It requires in both public and private schools that students from kindergarten through sixth grade receive 220 minutes of religious instruction and chapel every week, 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 eighteen, the consent of the child's parents. This constitutional safeguard is particularly important because most of the country's primary and elementary schools, high schools, and colleges are church-affiliated. There are occasional instances where administrators either do not know the law or misapply it. These are usually corrected through parent-school consultations. In rare cases, the Ministry of Education intervenes to correct the situation.

The constitution also stipulates that no one shall be required to receive religious instruction or attend services without his or her consent while serving in the armed forces, or while being detained in prison or in any correctional institution. The 850-member Defense Force supported one 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 faith 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious groups occasionally joined forces in ecumenical efforts to distribute goods to the needy, clean up neighborhoods, alert the public to the dangers of promiscuity, fight crime, protect children, and carry out similar endeavors. The Government also occasionally 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. Roman Catholicism is the official religion.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 424,164 square miles and a population estimated at nine million. According to a 2001 survey conducted by the National Statistical Institute, 78 percent of the population was Catholic. Of the remaining population, 16 percent was Protestant or evangelical, 3 percent followed other religions of Christian origin, 2.5 percent practiced no religion, and less than 0.2 percent claimed affiliation with other non-Christian faiths, including Islam, the Baha'i Faith, Judaism, Buddhism, and Shinto. Of those who habitually practiced their religion, 56.5 percent were Catholic, 36.5 percent Protestant or evangelical, and 7 percent other Christian religions. In urban areas, 80 percent of the population was Catholic, while 14 percent was Protestant or evangelical. In rural areas, 74 percent of the population was Catholic, while 20.5 percent was Protestant or evangelical. Mennonites, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, and several evangelical groups maintained an active foreign missionary presence. Atheists were estimated to constitute an insignificant percentage of the population.

Approximately 55 percent of the population identified itself as indigenous, with 30 percent identifying itself as Quechua and 25 percent as Aymara. Approximately 30 percent of the population identified itself as mestizo (of mixed indigenous and European ancestry) and 15 percent as white. Several other indigenous groups, including Guarani and Chiquitano, were also present.

The indigenous population was higher in rural areas, where the formal Catholic Church tended 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 was celebrated widely on January 24. Some indigenous leaders have sought to discard all forms of Christianity; however, this effort has not led to a significant increase in the number of "indigenous-belief only" worshippers.

Mormons were present throughout the country and had a particularly large presence in Cochabamba. The Mormon temple in Cochabamba was one of the largest in the world. Mormon sources estimated the number of their adherents at more than 150,000. The Jewish community was spread throughout the country and had synagogues in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz. Muslims had cultural centers that also served as mosques in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz that welcomed both Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims. Korean immigrants had their own church in La Paz. The majority of Korean, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants settled in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, where there was a university, founded by Korean immigrants, that had evangelical and Presbyterian ties. There were Buddhist and Shinto communities, as well as a substantial Baha'i community, throughout the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government 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. A successful movement to convene a new constituent assembly occurred in 2005, and the election of constituent assembly members was scheduled for July 2006.

Roman Catholicism predominated, and the constitution recognizes it as the official religion. The Catholic Church exercised a limited degree of political influence through the Catholic Bishops' Conference. By custom the Catholic Church was sometimes called upon to arbitrate political disagreements, but the custom was not formalized in law.

Four Christian holy days are observed as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, All Saints' Day, and Christmas.

Non-Catholic religious organizations, including missionary groups, must register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship and receive authorization (personeria juridica) for legal religious representation. There were no reports that the Government restricted gatherings of nonregistered religious groups, 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; however, the procedure typically requires significant legal assistance and can be both costly and time-consuming, which has led some groups to forgo registration and operate informally. Religious groups receiving funds from abroad may enter into a framework agreement (marco convenio) with the Government that lasts three years and permits them to enjoy judicial standing similar to that of other NGOs and have tax-free status. Members of less prominent religious communities have objected to the Government's lack of understanding regarding the activities and worship of these faiths, which allegedly has resulted in additional delays when attempting to finalize legal registration.

Only Catholic religious instruction is provided in public schools. By law, it is optional and is described as such in curricular materials; however, students face strong peer pressure to participate. Non-Catholic instruction is not available in public schools for students of other faiths.

The Government did not take an active role in promoting interfaith understanding, although it was represented at interfaith meetings. It worked with Catholic and Protestant organizations on social, health, and education programs. If the president attended Mass as part of his official functions, it was traditional for all cabinet members, regardless of their faiths, to accompany him.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, and ecumenical dialogue between various religious groups continued. Leaders from Muslim, Jewish, Baha'i, Catholic, and indigenous communities continued to hold interfaith meetings throughout 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. 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 3,287,673 square miles and a population of approximately 186 million. Nearly all major religions and religious organizations were present in the country. Many citizens worshipped in more than one church or participated in the rituals of more than one religion. The 2000 census indicated that approximately 74 percent of the population identified themselves as Roman Catho-

lic, 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. Denominations included the Assemblies of God, Christian Congregation of Brazil, and Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Baptists accounted for most of the remaining Protestants and were centered in the south. There were approximately 427,000 adherents of "Buddhism and other oriental religions."

Shintoism was practiced to a limited degree in the Japanese-Brazilian community. There were 27,239 Muslims (which probably undercounts the actual total), 39,840 practitioners of Spiritualism, 10,723 adherents of indigenous traditions, and 2,979 Hindus. Followers of African and syncretic religions such as Candomble, Xango, Macumba, and Umbanda constituted an estimated 0.4 percent of the population. Followers of spiritism, mainly Kardecists—adherents of the doctrine expounded by Frenchman Allan Kardec in the nineteenth century—constituted approximately 1.3 percent, with 2,337,432 followers. An estimated 7 percent did not practice any religion, and approximately 384,000 participants did not respond to the census.

Leaders of the Muslim community estimated that there were between 700,000 and three million Muslims, with the lower figure representing those who actively practiced their religion, while the higher estimate would include also nominal members. These figures were much higher than the 27,239 Muslims reported in the 2000 census. Muslim leaders have never taken a formal count of the number of Muslims; however, they believed that the official census greatly underestimated the size of their community. Sunni and Shi'a Islam are practiced predominantly by immigrants from Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt who arrived during the past twenty-five years. A recent trend has been the increase in conversions to Islam among non-Arab citizens. There were approximately fifty-five mosques and Muslim religious centers.

Approximately 101,062 citizens identified themselves as Jewish. There were an estimated 35,000 Jews in Rio de Janeiro and 29,000 in Sao Paulo. Many other cities had smaller Jewish communities.

Foreign missionary groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and several evangelical organizations, operated freely throughout the country. The Institute for Religious Studies indicated there were 2,981 foreign Protestant missionaries and approximately 3,000 foreign Catholic priests in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 religions or religious groups. There is no favored or state religion, although the Government maintains 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 religious holy days are observed as national or regional holidays: Saint Sebastian's Day, Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, Corpus Christi, Saint John's Day, Our Lady of Carmen ("Carmo"), Assumption Day, Our Lady Aparecida, All Souls' Day, Evangelicals Day, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas.

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 is to define how to offer religious instruction and in which religion. This is usually done in agreement with parent councils. Education is mandatory for all children, so they must attend either a private or a public school, but parents are free to send their children to the school of their choice.

The Government restricts the access of nonindigenous persons, including missionaries, to indigenous reserves and requires visitors to seek permission from the National Indian Foundation to enter official indigenous areas.

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 paraphernalia and mandates a two to five-year prison term for violators.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. There was no national ecumenical movement; however, the National Commission for Religious Dialogue brought together Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders.

Anti-Semitism was rare; however, there were signs of increasing violence against Jewish persons. Leaders in the Jewish community expressed concern over the continued appearance of anti-Semitic material on Internet web sites compiled by neo-Nazi and "skinhead" groups. There were reports of anti-Semitic graffiti, harassment, vandalism, and threats via telephone and e-mail.

In May 2005 four "skinheads" were arrested and charged with attempted murder, gang formation, and racism for attacking three Jewish students in Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State. During the investigations, the police identified a second group, with fascist orientation, that participated in the attacks. By the end of the period covered by this report, an additional ten persons had been arrested and charged with attempted homicide and gang formation; one person under the age of seventeen also was arrested. After spending more than one hundred days in jail, all fifteen were freed and awaiting the testimony stage of the process, which started in May 2006.

No further information was available on the 2004 incident in which anti-Semitic graffiti was found in a bathroom at Pontificia Universidade Catolica in Rio de Janeiro State (PUC–RJ); six students were under police investigation. PUC–RJ had approximately ten thousand students, 5 percent of whom were Jewish.

SECTION IV. U.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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 3,855,101 square miles and a population of approximately thirty-three 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.

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 UN Human Rights Committee reiterated its 1999 ruling that called on the Federal Government to "adopt steps in order to eliminate discrimination 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.

On September 11, 2005, Ontario's premier announced his government's intention to end civil enforcement of religious arbitration decisions in the province. Since 1991 the Ontario Arbitration Act had permitted religious organizations to hold tribunals in which marriage, family, and business disputes could be settled according to religious law. The tribunals were voluntary, and tribunal decisions had to comply with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and could be appealed through the court system. With the Family Statute Law Amendment Act of February 23, 2006, religious arbitration in family matters ended, making all family law arbitration subject to civil law. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Ontario government was developing regulations to implement the legislation.

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 2005 the British Columbia Supreme Court ruled that a fourteen-year-old girl, who was a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, could not refuse a blood transfusion as part of her treatment for cancer, despite the girl's protest that her religious beliefs did not allow for blood transfusions. In May 2005 she appealed the decision to a court in Ontario, but the judge refused to hear her arguments and ordered her to return to British Columbia. Subsequently, the government of British Columbia allowed the girl to travel abroad to receive treatment. She returned home in August 2005 after being treated without requiring a blood transfusion.

In September and October 2005, a Sikh law student was twice prohibited from riding on national rail carrier trains because he was wearing a kirpan (ceremonial

dagger). 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. The student's appeal to the Ontario Human Rights Commission for redress was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In January 2006 the Ontario Human Rights Commission ruled in favor of a woman who alleged she had been the target of discrimination for her belief in Falun Gong. The ruling expanded the commission's working definition of "creed" to include Falun Gong. The claimant had complained that she was harassed about her beliefs at the Ottawa Chinese Cultural Association and ultimately ejected from the group. The association was found liable for breaching Ontario's human rights code on the basis of religion. The claimant received $15,500 (C$18,000) in damages for the loss of dignity and "mental anguish."

In March 2006 the Supreme Court issued its unanimous decision in the case of a Sikh student whose Montreal school had prohibited him from wearing his kirpan under its "no weapons" policy. The court ruled in favor of the student, ruling that his religious rights had been infringed. Previously, the Board of Education had alleged that the kirpan presented a safety problem, while the student's family argued that banning the kirpan violated his religious rights. The Ontario Human Rights Commission argued in favor of balancing freedom of religion and safety and security.

Also in March 2006 the Quebec Human Rights Commission decided that a Montreal engineering school must allow its Muslim students to pray in dignity, although the school is not obligated to provide students with a dedicated prayer space. The school had previously blocked Muslim students from praying in school hallways and stairways, leading to the 2003 filing of a complaint. During the sixty-day period provided by the commission, the two sides failed to reach a "reasonable accommodation" regarding the students' prayer space. Discussions between Muslim representatives and the school continued at the end of the period covered by this report. In December 2005 Muslim students at McGill University filed a similar complaint with the commission, which had not issued a decision on the second complaint.

In March 2005 two complaints were filed with the Alberta Human Rights Commission against the Catholic bishop of Calgary after he stated in a pastoral letter his opposition to proposed same-sex marriage legislation by the Federal Government. Both complaints were later dropped.

In 2004 the police began a continuing 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 FLDS openly practices polygamy, a criminal offense according to the criminal code. British Columbia attorneys general have stated 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 based on denial of human rights was pending before the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal. The Government issued deportation orders on the grounds of illegal extended residence in the country for three foreign wives who alleged they were married to a former FLDS bishop. The women alleged that the Government's refusal to grant them residence 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, which were pending at 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

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

According to the June 2005 Council of American-Islamic Relations Canada's report, Presumption of Guilt: A National Survey on Security Visitations of Canadian Muslims, there was increasing concern in the Muslim community about visits by security officials, both at home and in the workplace. According to the report, authorities made a disproportionate number of visits to Arab males between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. The report detailed seven specific cases in which security officials were alleged to have discouraged legal representation, failed to provide

proper identification, or used threats and threatening behavior in the course of their interviews.

Throughout the period covered by this report, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) continued its outreach program, established in April 2005 in major cities, to ensure that all persons are treated equally and with respect in national security investigations. The program included community-based committees with members of the Muslim and Arab minorities to serve as avenues for communication on national security and cultural sensitivity matters. It also contained sensitivity training programs taught by individual ethnic and religious community members that were used to address allegations of insensitivity.

The B'nai Brith Canada League for Human Rights received 829 reports of anti†Semitic incidents in 2005, a 3.3 percent decrease compared to 2004. The highest number of reports came from Ontario Province (544 incidents, 418 of which took place in the Greater Toronto area), followed by Quebec Province (133 incidents, 127 of which took place in Montreal); approximately 80 percent of the Jewish population resided in these two provinces. B'nai Brith also reported significant regional increases in reports received in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Maritime Provinces. Both Montreal and Winnipeg showed significant decreases from the 2004 numbers. The 829 reports included 531 cases of harassment, 273 cases of vandalism, and 25 cases of violence. Of these, 167 cases involved attacks on synagogues, Jewish homes, or communal buildings. Jewish students reported 48 cases of anti-Semitic incidents that occurred on campus, and another 48 involved school settings. The B'nai Brith League also noted a marked increase in web-based hate, with 161 reports, including 34 cases of targeted hate by e-mail.

On July 8, 2005, a Saskatoon court found the former leader of the Assembly of First Nations guilty of willfully promoting hatred against Jews under the hate propaganda provisions of the criminal code and fined him $850 (C$1,000). The charges stemmed from remarks made in a 2002 public address to the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. Claiming that the defendant's remarks were part of a private conversation, the defendant's lawyer launched a successful appeal in a Saskatchewan court that on June 8, 2006, set aside the earlier ruling and ordered a new trial. On June 19, the Saskatchewan Justice Department announced its plans to appeal the decision to the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal.

In November 2005 the attorney general of Ontario charged a man with committing hate crimes, as well as with seven counts of mischief under $4,250 (C$5,000) and two counts of threatening death. The charges stemmed from incidents in 2004 targeting Muslims, Arabs, and Jews at Ryerson University in which the accused spray†painted anti-Muslim graffiti in the multifaith prayer room on campus and anti-Semitic graffiti elsewhere around the university campus. The case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

A number of mosques were vandalized, including several mosques in the Montreal area, in February and March 2006. At the end of the period covered by this report, police had not identified suspects in these incidents. This followed media coverage of the international reaction to publication in Denmark of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. In April 2006 a mosque in the Quebec city of Trois Rivieres, home to approximately 300 Muslims, was targeted with racist posters.

During the same period, approximately forty-five acts of vandalism against Christian cemeteries and churches were identified in the media. On June 27, 2006, a Manitoba court sentenced three individuals to prison terms of two years minus one day to three years for the arson destruction of a 105-year-old church. An amount of $1 million (C$1.2 million) was levied against the three as restitution. The individuals, followers of a Norwegian musician jailed for a 1993 murder and for the destruction of several churches in Europe, set the church ablaze on February 12, 2006, the Norwegian convict's birthday. The individual receiving the stiffest sentence had previously been charged with arson in an April 2004 fire that destroyed another church and with the vandalism of tombstones in Manitoba and Alberta. He was scheduled to appear in court on August 3, 2006.

In May 2006 St. Alban's Anglican Church, located in a Victoria, British Columbia, suburb was vandalized. Church lights and stained glass windows were smashed, Bibles and other religious objects were desecrated, and cigarette butts and empty wine bottles were left in and around the church. Police made arrests in the case, but by the end of the period covered by this report, authorities had not charged anyone. Church officials indicated they did not plan to press charges.

Following the June 2, 2006, arrests of seventeen individuals with "Muslim" names in the Toronto area on alleged terrorism charges, several anti-Muslim incidents occurred in various locations, including in Montreal and Toronto. On June 9 a Montreal imam was threatened with a knife outside his mosque, leading to the arrest of the alleged attacker. Police charged the individual with armed assault, uttering

threats, and possession of a dangerous weapon; the suspect was released on bail while the investigation continued. On June 3 vandals broke windows and damaged cars parked at the Rexdale mosque in northwest Toronto. Police classified the attack as a hate crime and continued their search for the perpetrators while increasing patrols at all mosques in the city to prevent further vandalism. Muslim and non-Muslim community leaders and government officials were among those who urged calm and referred to the averted criminal acts as "motivated by politics and hatred, not by any religion or faith."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses with the Government ways to promote religious freedom and other human rights throughout the world.

CHILE

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 292,260 square miles and a population of slightly more than fifteen million. According to a 2002 census, 70 percent of the population age fourteen or older was identified as Roman Catholic, and evangelicals totaled 1,699,725 persons, or 15.1 percent of the population over the age of fourteen. 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 were Pentecostal. Also present were traditional Protestant churches, including Wesleyan, Lutheran, Reformed Evangelical, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, Anglican, and Methodist.

Other affiliations recorded in the 2002 census were Jehovah's Witnesses (119,455 persons), Mormons (103,735), Jews (14,976), Orthodox Christians (6,959), and Muslims (2,894). All other religions totaled 493,147 persons, or 4.4 percent. Atheists and those "indifferent" regarding religion constituted approximately 8.3 percent (931,990) of the population over the age of 14. The Baha'is were not mentioned in the census, but adherents estimated the number of practitioners at six thousand. There was also a small Buddhist population as well as a very small number of Unification Church members.

Members of the largest religious groups were numerous in the capital; Catholic, Pentecostal, and other evangelical churches were also active in other regions of the country. Jewish communities were located in Santiago, Valparaiso, Vina del Mar, Valdivia, Temuco, Concepcion, and Iquique (although there was no synagogue in Iquique). Mosques were located in Santiago and Iquique.

Indigenous people made up 5 percent (780,000) of the population. Of this group, 65 percent identified themselves as Catholic, 29 percent as evangelicals, and 6 percent as "other." Mapuche communities, constituting 87 percent of indigenous citizens, continued to respect traditional religious leaders (Longkos and Machis), and anecdotal information indicated a high degree of syncretism in worship and persistence of traditional healing practices. Many indigenous people considered these cultural rather than religious practices.

Foreign missionaries operated freely, and many Catholic priests were of foreign 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. 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: Corpus Christi, 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 obtain 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 ninety days on the grounds that all legal prerequisites for registration have not been satisfied. The petitioner then has sixty 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.

At the end of the period covered by this report, 1,068 religious groups and related organizations had registered under the 1999 law and gained legal public right status. This number included the Catholic Church, Greek and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, a wide range of Protestant churches (evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Episcopalian), several Buddhist temples, Jewish congregations, Islamic mosques, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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 Roman Catholicism is often provided privately through Sunday schools and at other venues. Local school administrations decide how funds are spent on religious instruction. Although the Ministry of Education has approved curricula for fourteen 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 faiths. There were thirty-five Catholic chapels, thirty†nine paid Catholic chaplains, and more than one thousand volunteers authorized to conduct religious activities in the prison system. Prison authorities have established two evangelical Christian chaplain positions at a national level, and every prison has designated evangelical Christian pastoral workers. Non-Catholic pastors reported that their access to prisons and hospitals was generally good during the period covered by this report.

The celebration of a 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, and regulations implementing the 1999 law had not been promulgated. Military recruits, whatever their religion, are required at times to attend Catholic events involving their unit. Membership in the Catholic Church is considered beneficial to a military career; in the navy, it is said to be almost a requirement for advancement to the highest posts.

On September 15, 2005, the Supreme Court upheld a March 2005 appeals court ruling that the Unification Church could be denied religious nonprofit organization status on grounds that the Church represented a threat to public order and the family. This was the first time under the 1999 law that an organization's registration was contested for other than technical reasons. The Unification Church continued to operate and worship under a more limited nonprofit organization status and was considering filing a new registration request.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some discrimination occurred.

Ecumenical groups existed, including the Ecumenical Brotherhood of Chile, bringing together diverse Christian churches; the Abrahamic Forum, bringing together Jews, Christians, and Muslims; and the Judeo-Christian Confraternity. These groups organize periodic dialogues to address specific social matters. Universities and seminaries also organize interreligious dialogues and events.

There were isolated reports of anti-Semitic incidents, including spray-painted graffiti of swastikas and derogatory comments directed at Jewish individuals. In April 2006 Rodrigo Goldberg, a non-Jewish soccer player, requested that the Federation Internationale de Football Association impose sanctions on five fans who directed anti-Semitic epithets at him during a soccer match in Santiago. Street gangs identifying themselves as neo-Nazis or "skinheads" were involved in violence and attacks against non-Jewish victims in Santiago and other urban areas.

SECTION IV. U.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 faiths. In addition, the embassy closely followed the denial of religious nonprofit status to the Unification Church.

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 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. Paramilitary organizations, including the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), also targeted representatives and members of religious organizations.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, although some indigenous leaders reportedly were intolerant of nonsyncretic forms of worship.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 439,735 square miles and a population of 41.2 million. Although the Government does not keep official statistics on religious affiliation, a June 22, 2006, article in the daily newspaper El Pais cited that 95 percent of the population was Catholic (with the footnote that not all are active practitioners of the faith), 3 percent was Protestant, and the remaining 2 percent belonged to other religions, such as Islam and Judaism. However, religious leaders cited different numbers. According to the Colombian Evangelical Council of Churches (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. According to data provided by their respective national headquarters, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses had 180,000, 130,000, and 110,000 members respectively, totaling approximately 1 percent of the population. Other religious

faiths and movements with a significant number of adherents included Judaism, estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000, Islam, animism, and various syncretic belief systems.

Adherents of some religions were concentrated in specific geographic regions. For example, the vast majority of practitioners of syncretic beliefs that blend Catholicism with elements of African animism were Afro-Colombian residents in the western department of Choco. Jews were concentrated in major cities, Muslims on the Caribbean coast, and adherents of indigenous animistic religions in remote, rural areas. A small Taoist commune existed in a mountainous region of Santander Department.

Jewish leaders estimated that as many as one-third of their community had emigrated by the end of 2000. The principal cause was economic hardship caused by the country's recession, which resulted in increased violence against Jewish businesses. However, since the security situation has improved in recent years, members of the community have returned, although specific numbers were not available.

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 Day, Saint Joseph Day, Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, 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 there is no official church or religion, but it adds that the state "is not atheist or agnostic, nor indifferent to Colombians' religious sentiment." Some interpret this to mean that the state unofficially sanctions a privileged position for Catholicism, which was the country's official religion until the adoption of the 1991 constitution. A 1973 concordat between the Vatican and the Government remains in effect, although some of its articles are unenforceable because of constitutional provisions on freedom of religion. A 1994 constitutional court decision declared unconstitutional any official government reference to a religious characterization of the country.

The Government extends two different kinds of recognition to religious organizations: Recognition as a legal entity (personeria juridica) and special public recognition as a religious entity. Although the application process is often lengthy, the Ministry of Interior and Justice readily grants the former recognition; the only legal requirements are submission of a formal request and basic organizational information. In addition, any foreign religious group that wishes to establish a presence must document official recognition by authorities in its home country. The Ministry of Interior and Justice may reject requests that do not comply fully with established requirements or that violate fundamental constitutional rights.

Since 1995 the Ministry of Interior and Justice has approved 787 of the 2,562 applications for special public recognition as a religious entity; an estimated 90 percent of the approvals were for evangelical churches. According to the ministry, 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 forty churches have asked the Government to sponsor legislation establishing less exacting standards for special public recognition and formally codifying religious freedoms provided for in the constitution. Although the Ministry of Interior and Justice 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, thirteen 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, have not

sought to accede to the 1997 public law. 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 denominations that have received special public recognition. Foreign missionaries are required to possess a special visa, valid for a maximum of two years. Applicants must have either a certificate from the Ministry of Interior and Justice confirming that the religion is registered with the ministry or a certificate issued by the religious organization itself confirming the applicant's membership. In both cases, applicants must explain the purpose of the proposed sojourn and provide proof of economic means. The Government permits proselytizing among the indigenous population provided the indigenous group welcomes them and visitors do not induce members of indigenous communities to adopt changes that endanger their survival on traditional lands.

The constitution recognizes parents' right to choose the type of education their children receive, including religious instruction. It also states that no student shall be forced to receive religious education in public schools. The Catholic Church and religious groups that have acceded to the 1997 public law agreement may provide religious instruction in public schools to students who wish to receive it, but students may opt out of sectarian religious instruction. Religious groups that have not acceded to the public law agreement may establish parochial schools, provided they comply with Ministry of Education requirements. For example, the Jewish community operates its own schools. The Catholic Church has an agreement with the Government to provide education in rural areas that have no state-operated schools. The schools are tax-exempt.

According to an October 2005 report in the daily newspaper El Tiempo, a Seventh-day Adventist student tried unsuccessfully to reach an agreement with her instructor for permission to miss a class on Friday evenings at a public school to practice her religion. After being dismissed from the class, the student filed suit in a regional level court, which subsequently backed the school's decision. However, the constitutional court overturned it on appeal and ordered the school to reenroll the student and accommodate her worship schedule.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although the 1991 constitution mandated 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 thirteen non-Catholic churches that are signatories to the 1997 public law agreement. 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 have 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 two minutes daily without cost.

All legally recognized churches, seminaries, monasteries, and convents are exempt from national and local taxes and customs duties. However, some Protestant churches reported that municipal governments required them to pay property and other local taxes. Local governments may exempt religiously affiliated organizations such as schools and libraries. However, according to the Christian Union Movement, an association of evangelical Christian churches, only ten municipalities have exempted non-Catholic churches from local taxes.

Congress did not act on legislation, sponsored by the human rights ombudsman, that evangelical leaders said would limit their freedom of religious expression. However, the Bogota municipal government introduced a city planning proposal that would restrict the number of churches in residential areas and place stringent building codes on church facilities. CEDECOL claimed that such a regulation, to be applied retroactively, would close 70 percent of the 1,500 Protestant churches in the capital. Evangelical, Muslim, and Anglican leaders complained that the proposal showed favoritism toward Catholicism, since many Catholic churches are historic monuments in central locations and thus exempt from the proposal's requirements. In November 2005 national leaders from the Anglican, Muslim, Seventh-day Adventist, Baptist, and evangelical communities formed the Colombian Confederation of Religious and Conscience Freedom to encourage government cooperation in strengthening religious freedom and combating the proposal.

There were setbacks 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. In May 2005 a suspect in custody thought to be one of the commune's principle leaders, Diego Leno Agudelo ("Saidamandan"), was released due to mistaken identity, and another suspect escaped from custody. At the end of the period covered by this report, neither suspect had been apprehended.

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.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

The FARC, the AUC, and the National Liberation Army guerilla group (ELN) generally targeted religious leaders and practitioners for political or financial, rather than religious, reasons. The FARC and the AUC were responsible for the majority of such attacks and threats, killing, kidnapping, extorting, and inhibiting free religious expression.

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. According to the Mennonite Church organization Justicia, Paz y Accion Noviolenta (or Justapaz) and CEDECOL's La Comision de Restauracion, Vida y Paz, at least 134 evangelical church leaders were killed in the past four years. According to the Catholic Bishops' Conference, terrorist groups have killed seven priests since 2003. 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. Justapaz and CEDECOL claimed that paramilitaries and guerrillas equally committed violence against evangelical church leaders but said the ELN leadership had agreed not to target evangelicals for political or religious reasons.

Religious leaders generally chose not to seek government protection because of their pacifist beliefs and fear of retribution from terrorist groups. Nevertheless, in response to the increased risks faced by church members, local citizens living near Catholic churches have set up more than 750 local security fronts to protect priests and officials. The national police designed the program following the 2002 assassination of Monsignor Isaias Duarte Cancino, the Catholic archbishop of Cali. The protection plan was not extended to include other religious groups.

In August 2005 Catholic priests Vicente Rozo Bayona and Ramon Emilio Mora were killed when their vehicle came under attack in Norte de Santander Department. The ELN later admitted responsibility for the killing, claiming they had mistaken the priests' vehicles for those used by paramilitaries, and apologized for the killings.

In August 2005 in Tolima Department, gunmen pulled Catholic priest Jesus Adrian Sanchez from a classroom and shot him in front of his students. According to the Catholic Bishops' Conference, the FARC killed Sanchez for his activism against the group's recruitment of child soldiers. Caracol television news later reported that FARC leader "Mono Jojoy" had ordered his troops to "kill all pastors." The television report indicated that Sanchez's killing was part of this FARC campaign, based on a taped conversation obtained from a FARC deserter.

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.

Catholic priest Cesar Dario Pena, whom the FARC kidnapped in 2004, was reportedly killed in September 2005, according to a captured a FARC leader; however, a body had not been recovered at the end of the period covered by this report.

In January 2006 a court sentenced FARC commander John Fredy Jimenez and hired gunman Alexander de Jesus Zapata for their role in the 2002 killing of Archbishop Isaias Duarte. Jimenez and Zapata were sentenced to thirty-five years and thirty-six years, respectively.

In March 2006 evangelical pastor Oscar Munoz Perea was shot and killed in Buenaventura, Valle de Cauca Department. Witnesses identified the killers as belonging to the AUC.

In May 2006 El Colombiano, a Medellin-based daily newspaper, reported that the body of Catholic priest Javier Francisco Montoya had been found and identified. The FARC, who kidnapped Montoya in Choco Department in 2004 and later killed him, had previously refused to hand over the body.

There were no developments in the case of the FARC's killing of three persons in Puerto Asis, Putumayo Department, in 2004. Justapaz claimed, however, that the FARC was threatening a witness to the massacre.

The Human Rights Unit of the Prosecutor General's Office continued to investigate the killings in past years of fourteen members of the clergy believed to have been slain because they were outspoken critics of terrorist organizations.

Religious leaders and practitioners were the targets of threats and kidnappings by guerrilla groups and paramilitaries. Five members of the religious organization Justicia y Paz in Choco Department kidnapped in April 2005 were liberated fifteen days after they were initially captured. Justicia y Paz said the incident was a case of mistaken identity.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference reported that sixty-four Catholic churches had been seriously damaged or destroyed in the last decade. Catholic churches generally were not attacked intentionally, but often they were affected by guerrilla attacks on police stations and mayors' offices located nearby.

According to the Christian Union Movement, advances by government security forces against the FARC have resulted in the reopening of approximately 350 of the more than 450 evangelical churches closed since 2002. However, guerrillas and paramilitaries continued to attack rural evangelical churches and schools because they suspected the churches were fronts for U.S. Government activities. Mormon Church leaders and facilities remained under threat for the same reason.

Due to threats from guerrillas or paramilitaries, many religious authorities were forced to refrain from publicly discussing the country's internal conflict. Illegal armed groups, especially the FARC, threatened or attacked religious officials for opposing the forced recruitment of minors, promoting human rights, assisting internally displaced persons, and discouraging coca cultivation. The Catholic Bishops' Conference also reported that paramilitaries and guerrillas issued death threats against rural priests who spoke out against them. In response to such threats, some religious leaders relocated to other communities.

Guerrillas or paramilitaries harassed some indigenous groups that 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic Church and some evangelical churches reported that some indigenous leaders were intolerant of nonsyncretic forms of worship.

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.

There were isolated reports of anti-Semitism, including graffiti painted on exterior walls of synagogues. Anti-Semitic statements in pamphlets and books published by small xenophobic organizations also were distributed and sold on limited scales. The Government condemned these acts and worked with members of the Jewish community to investigate the incidents, although laws guaranteeing freedom of expression have impeded actions against the publishers. Jewish leaders stated that relations between the Government and the Jewish and Muslim communities were generally stronger than those between the government and the evangelical community. The Jewish community has taken a number of steps to combat anti-Semitism by advancing dialogue with other religious groups and by holding educational forums on Judaism at Christian churches, private and public schools, and universities.

In May 2006 the Catholic cardinal of Bogota threatened to excommunicate five constitutional court justices for voting to partially decriminalize abortion. However, at of the end of the period covered by this report, the Catholic Church had not taken such action.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 19,730 square miles and a population of approximately 4.25 million, according to the National Institute of Census and Statistics. The most recent nationwide survey of religion, conducted in 2004 by the University of Costa Rica, found that 47 percent of the population identified themselves as practicing Roman Catholics, 25 percent considered themselves nonpracticing Roman Catholics, 13 percent said they were evangelical Protestants, 10 percent reported that they did not have a religion, and 5 percent declared that they belonged to "another religion."

Apart from the dominant Catholic religion, there were several other religious groups in the country. Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, and other Protestant groups had significant membership. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) had a temple in San Jose that served as a regional worship center for Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua, and Honduras. Although they represented less than 1 percent of the population, Jehovah's Witnesses had a strong presence on the Caribbean coast. Seventh-day Adventists operated a university that attracted students from throughout the Caribbean Basin. The Unification Church maintained its continental headquarters for Latin America in San Jose. Non-Christian religious groups, including Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Hare Krishna, Scientology, Tenrikyo, and the Baha'i Faith, claimed membership throughout the country, with the majority of worshippers residing in the Central Valley (the area of the capital). While there was no general correlation between religion and ethnicity, indigenous peoples were more likely to practice animism than other religions.

Foreign missionaries and clergy of all denominations worked and proselytized freely. Mormons had the most active mission program, with 148 full-time missionaries. Many churches had short-term missions that could last a month or less and comprise up to twenty persons.

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 Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for managing the Government's relationship with the Catholic Church and other religious groups in the country.

In September 2005 the constitutional court rejected a motion filed by a private citizen alleging that Article 75 of the constitution, which establishes Catholicism as the official state religion, was unconstitutional because it violated international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights.

At the end of the period covered by this report, no legislative action had been taken on a 2003 proposed constitutional amendment to remove language in the constitution declaring Roman Catholicism the official state religion.

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 nineteenth century. Although records of these seizures existed and were being relied upon for certain land restoration cases, the Government also has a constitutional obligation to support the Church as the official state religion. 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 notary publics, only officials of the Catholic Church can perform marriages that are automatically recognized by the state. Other religious groups can perform wedding ceremonies, but the marriage must then be legalized via a civil union. Couples may also choose to have only a civil ceremony.

Various traditional Catholic religious 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 religious holy day, the labor code provides the necessary flexibility for that observance upon the employer's approval.

The Government does not require religious groups to register, nor does it inhibit the establishment of religious groups through taxation or special licensing requirements. Such groups may incorporate to acquire legal status and must have a minimum of twelve 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 2,700 registered religious associations, representing 200 denominations.

According to the General Directorate of Immigration, applications by foreign missionaries seeking permission to work in the country are studied on a case†by†case basis. They may be given a temporary permit that is granted for a maximum, nonrenewable term of six months. The missionary may enter the country as a tourist and then apply for the permit upon arrival. Alternatively, foreign missionaries may apply for an annually renewable temporary residence. This status is granted by a special migration council that consists of representatives from the Ministries of Public Security, Foreign Affairs, Labor, and Justice. In either case, missionaries must be accredited to an officially recognized church to receive the permit.

Catholic religious instruction is provided in the public schools; however, it is not mandatory. Students may obtain exemptions from this instruction with the permission of their parents. The school director, the student's parents, and the student's teacher must agree on an alternative course of instruction for the exempted student during instruction time. Religious education teachers in public schools must be certified by the Catholic Bishops' Conference, which does not certify teachers from other religious groups.

According to the education code, the Catholic Church has sole authority to select teachers of religion within the public school system. The Church maintains an office within the Ministry of Education expressly to carry out this function. According to the Department of Religious Education, only Catholic University graduates are eligible to teach religion in public school.

Private schools are free to offer any religious instruction they choose. Parents do not have the option of home schooling their children.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Applications to establish a place of worship must be submitted 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 by municipalities, local health departments, or police as a result of noise violations. Representatives from the Evangelical Alliance Federation alleged that the noise pollution claims were baseless and that local officials closed down the churches simply because they did not like them. 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.

A Catholic priest who had been threatened with deportation for working without the proper visa was granted reprieve in July 2005, when the Supreme Court cancelled the deportation order.

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

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

At the end of the period covered by this report, authorities had neither filed charges nor released information regarding potential suspects in the 2003 beating of a priest who was the spokesperson of the Catholic Bishops' Conference. The priest blamed the followers of a breakaway Catholic group, The Queen and Lady of All Creation, for the attack, claiming that it was in retaliation for the Church's decision to disavow the group.

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. 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 for situation-specific consultation.

CUBA

The constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice the Government continued to place restrictions on freedom of religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Overall human rights conditions remained poor. 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's continued its efforts to maintain a strong degree of control over religion. During the period covered by this report, the Government implemented new regulations that restricted the operation of house churches but eased its policy on issuing work permits to foreign Catholic clergy.

The relationship among religious groups in general was amicable.

The U.S. Government attempted to raise human rights issues, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials; however, the Government refused to discuss such matters. 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 was no independent authoritative source on the size or composition of religious institutions and their membership. A 1953 survey indicated that 93 percent

of the population identified themselves as Roman Catholic. According to more recent information from the U.S.-based Puebla Institute, approximately 40 to 45 percent of the population were believed to identify themselves, at least nominally, with the Catholic Church. Some sources estimated that as much as 70 percent of the population practiced 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. Membership in the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) increased to twenty-three when World Wide Missions, a Pentecostal church, joined in March 2006. Other members included Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Methodist groups, but not the Catholic Church. The CCC was structured into five "zones" across the island and, according to the CCC's leadership, represented approximately 100,000 Christians. Most CCC members were 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 approximately 10 percent of baptized Catholics attended Mass regularly. Membership in Protestant churches increased and was estimated at 530,000 persons. No figures on the number of Pentecostals were available, but their numbers were believed to be increasing sharply. Jehovah's Witnesses claimed more than 86,000 active members, and the Seventh-day Adventists reported approximately 30,000 persons. Anglicans were estimated to number 22,000 members, and Presbyterians 14,000. The Jewish community had approximately 1,000 members, around half of them resident in Havana. The Muslim population was estimated at no less than 300. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) had an estimated active membership of fifteen.

There were approximately 344 Catholic priests, 61 permanent deacons, and 628 nuns in the country, many fewer than the total prior to 1960. Fewer than half of all Catholic "religious" priests, as opposed to "diocesan" priests, were 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.

Foreign missionary groups operated in the country through registered churches. Visits by religious figures, including that of Nation of Islam minister Louis Farrakhan in March 2006, are handled by the Religious Affairs Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution recognizes the right of citizens to profess and practice any religious belief within the framework of respect for the law; however, in law and in practice, the Government places restrictions on freedom of religion. The constitution has provided for the separation of church and state since the early twentieth 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 appeared 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 carry out their activities, demonstrate that they have the funding for these activities, and obtain certification from the Registry of Associations that they are not duplicating the activities of a previously registered organization. Registration allows church officials to obtain official permission to travel abroad and receive foreign visitors, receive imported religious literature through the CCC, and meet in officially recognized places of worship. Conversely, members of unregistered religious groups must request exit permits on an individual basis, obtain religious materials through extralegal means, and risk closure of their technically illegal meeting places.

The Government appeared to have halted registration of new denominations; however, no groups were known to have applied for and been denied registration during the period covered by this report. Authorities continued to ignore religious groups' pending applications for legal recognition, thereby subjecting members of such groups to potential charges of illegal association; however, no such charges had been filed by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government tolerated some religions, such as the Baha'i Faith and a small group of Mormons, that were relatively new in the country. 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.

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. In early 2006 a Presbyterian youth group in Santa Clara passed out copies of the New Testament at a public park without being arrested or detained. Similarly, a small number of fundamentalist Christians were reported to have occasionally given impromptu testimonials at certain parks in Havana; no one was arrested.

Since 1992 the Communist Party has admitted as members persons who openly declare their religious faith.

The Government does not permit religious education in public schools and does not permit the operation of private schools of any kind, including religious schools, although several international schools in Havana are given considerable leeway in setting their curricula. The Government has allowed 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, continued to engage in efforts to control and monitor the country's religious institutions, including surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of religious professionals and laypersons. In 2004 an independent journalist interviewed a former Ministry of Interior official who reported widespread government infiltration of civil and religious organizations. The former official reported that Afro-Caribbean religious groups were even more heavily targeted for infiltration than political opposition organizations. Some estimates stated that 70 percent of the population practiced these religions in some form, and therefore these groups were seen as a more grassroots threat to the power and authority of the Government.

The law allows for the construction of new churches once the required permits are obtained; however, the Government rarely has authorized construction permits, forcing many churches to 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 period covered by this report. 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 were able to hold services in private homes. However, during the period covered by this report, the Government implemented a controversial directive that many religious groups viewed as restricting the operation of house churches. Such facilities have grown in number in recent years, and many religious leaders attributed this to the Government's refusal to authorize the construction of new churches. The vast majority of house churches were unregistered with the Government and thus technically illegal. Directive 43 and Resolution 46 require house-church operators to register their house churches with the Government, thus "legalizing" their existence. House churches were difficult to quantify, but Christian Solidarity Worldwide estimated their number at no less than 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. To register one's house church, an operator must meet a number of requirements, some of which infringe on religious freedom: The house church must host no more than three meetings per week; it must not be located within two 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, among other things, that the use of a sound system requires permission from neighbors and that no house church can operate in a multifamily residence.

Church officials from a number of 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 them-

selves singled 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 has risen sharply in recent years. At least one Baptist church leader criticized the requirement that a house church not be located within two kilometers of another house church, arguing that the directive would be difficult to obey in a congested city.

The Government continued to allow foreign priests and religious workers into the country 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 stopped working in the country. However, in June 2005 the Government eased this policy, and during the period covered by this report it granted work permits to at least eight foreign priests and fourteen foreign nuns who entered the country as nonreplacements. In addition, for the first time in many years the Government allowed into the country three new Catholic congregations, or orders, including Franciscan nuns from Colombia. The applications of 104 priests and nuns remained pending.

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 concede control to the state regarding the content and format of church publications. Several Catholic dioceses and lay groups published magazines, including Palabra Nueva of the Havana archdiocese and Vitral of the Pinar del Rio diocese.

The Government has not blocked printing or distribution of Catholic magazines; however, the state impedes access to printing by making equipment costly or placing restrictions on sales. The Government has accused the editor of one religious magazine of subversive behavior for writing about sensitive political and social issues.

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. In January and February 2006, unknown assailants repeatedly stoned the home of outspoken Santiago priest Jose Conrado Rodriguez Alegre. Rodriguez's church was robbed at least six times during the period covered by this report. One robbery cost the church its microphones and ventilator, and the police arrived to investigate at the start of Mass on Sunday morning. Police confiscated the vehicle Rodriguez used, and his dog was poisoned. Rodriguez, who has called attention to the country's human rights record, was watched closely by state security and received a citation to appear before government authorities.

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." However, in April 2006 authorities allowed two Catholic bishops, in Holguin and Bayamo, to broadcast a Holy Week radio message. In Holguin the twelve-minute program was the first such message in forty-six years.

Senior Catholic Church officials occasionally gained an audience with senior government leaders. The highest-level meeting known to have occurred during the period covered by this report was on February 17, 2006, between Fidel Castro and Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, head of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. During the visit, the Vatican made public a letter from Pope Benedict XVI, calling on Cubans to show more tolerance.

The Jewish community had a modus vivendi with the regime that allowed the main synagogue and community center to function with 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 must submit a written request, and the prison director must grant approval. Some prisoners reported that prison officials ignored repeated written requests for religious visits. In punishment cells, prisoners were denied access to reading materials, including Bibles. At the end of the period covered by this report, human rights activist Rene Gomez Manzano, detained on July 22, 2005, had been held at three prisons and at all three was denied visits from Catholic priests. However, he was allowed to receive and read a Bible provided by a visiting family member.

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 controls the Internet, and any group seeking legal access is subject to its controls. The Government denies Internet access to some religious groups that it deems unreliable. Following a November 2005 meeting with Castro, the country's thirteen bishops were allowed access at the CCCB's Havana headquarters. However, they lacked access at their homes and 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 provide 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. However, during the period covered by this report some Jehovah's Witness children were denied participation in school field trips because of their religion.

Officials of various groups have reported cases of religious persons experiencing discrimination because of ignorance or personal prejudice by a local official. Religious persons have 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 has decided to stop requesting permits for processions in areas where they historically have not been permitted. There were smaller, local processions throughout the provinces during the period covered by this report.

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 2006 government-directed mobs physically prevented at least five such wives from traveling to Havana for the Mass, keeping them from leaving the cities of Puerto Padre, Sancti Spiritus, and Ciego de Avila; two of the five were removed from buses. 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's 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.

Guards at the Villa Clara Youth Prison in Santa Clara destroyed Santeria altars and other religious articles on December 17, 2005, the Day of Saint Lazarus, a date celebrated not only by those who practice Santeria but also by many Catholics. The altars, a throne, and other items crafted by inmates, among them Lester Gonzalez Penton, were kicked to pieces by the guards. At the same facility, guards forced prisoner Cosme Manuel Chamizo Moreno to take down an altar he had established for his own worship.

Also in December 2005 the Government reportedly gave the order for the destruction of a Protestant church in the eastern Havana community of Alamar. The congregation did not have government permission to build the church, allegedly used by hundreds of worshippers.

In February 2006 at Havana's Combinado del Este prison, prison authorities broke up a prayer group of more than fifteen inmates without explanation. The incident was revealed in a note smuggled out of the prison. The Government continued to deny access to the country's prisons to international groups focused on fundamental rights, including religious rights.

There were reports that independent Santeria priests were pressured to join the government-sanctioned Yoruba Cultural Association.

There were no reports of persons being detained on religious grounds, but at least three religious figures were in prison on other grounds. Ricardo Santiago Medina Salabarria, an Orthodox Church clergyman, was held without formal charges in connection with a protest in which he took part outside the French embassy in Havana.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

The relationship among religious groups in general was amicable, and organized religious groups were widely respected in society.

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 attempted to raise human rights issues, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials, but the Government refused to discuss such matters. 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 delivery of donated goods and materials that in some cases were provided to religious institutions. The Interests Section continued to raise issues of human rights, including religious discrimination and harassment, with government officials; however, the Government refused to discuss these concerns. As in the past, the U.S. Government continuously urged international pressure on the Government to cease its repressive practices, including religious discrimination and harassment.

DOMINICA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 291 square miles and an estimated population of 70,000. Approximately 61 percent of the population adhered to the Roman Catholic faith. According to the 2001 population and housing census, followers of evangelical churches represented 18 percent of the population. Seventh-day Adventists and Methodists represented the next largest denominations, accounting for 6 percent and 3.7 percent of the population, respectively. 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.

All religious organizations are required to register with the Government. Organizations must register their buildings through an application to the government registrar, and they then must register as nonprofit organizations with the attorney general. Such recognition affects a church's nonprofit organization status, its ability to hold public meetings, and the work status of the church's missionaries. Any organization denied permission to register has the right to apply for judicial review.

On February 21, 2006, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) received approval of its application to operate in the country and filed its articles of incorporation. The Church submitted its application in 2003 and ultimately had to pursue the matter through legal channels to obtain recognition.

The public school curriculum includes Christian education, and students are led in prayer during morning assembly. Non-Christian students are not required to participate. There are Catholic, Methodist, and Seventh-day Adventist schools, and the Government subsidizes teachers' salaries at religiously affiliated schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Rastafarians complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, was illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, which occupies two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, has an area of 18,815 square miles and a population estimated at 9.1 million. The largest religious denomination was 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) had a much smaller but generally growing presence. According to Demos 2004, a population survey taken in 2004 by the Center for Political and Social Studies of the Pontifical Catholic Mother and Teacher University and the Center for Social Studies and Demographics, the population was nominally 64.4 percent Catholic and 11.4 percent Protestant (under which category the survey grouped evangelicals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and traditional Protestants). In the same study, 22.5 percent of the sample said they had no religion. Demos 2004 also reported that 55.1 percent of respondents considered themselves religiously observant, while 44.3 percent did not practice actively. The Dominican Council of Evangelicals claimed that evangelicals represented 16 percent of the population. Anecdotal evidence suggested that individuals who identified themselves as Protestants and evangelicals were significantly more likely to be religiously observant than Catholics.

There were approximately 300 Jews in the country, of whom 200 were observant. Most lived in Santo Domingo, which had a synagogue and a community leader but no ordained rabbi. There was a synagogue for the small Jewish community in Sosua, descended from the resettlement of more than 600 European Jewish refugees before the Second World War. Both synagogues were led by the same individual. Various government sources estimated that there were between 5,000 and 10,000 Muslims in the country. There was an active Sunni mosque in Santo Domingo, with approximately 250 regular worshippers. A few adherents practiced Buddhism and Hinduism. Many Catholics practiced a combination of Catholicism and Afro-Caribbean beliefs (santería) or witchcraft (brujería), but because these practices were usually concealed, the number of adherents was unknown.

Organized foreign missionary groups working in the country included Mormons, Mennonites, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Other missionaries were nondenominational or affiliated with independent churches.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 of the country 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 a complete exoneration from customs duties.

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 have 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.

The law requires that the Bible be read in public schools, but it was not enforced. Private schools are not obliged to include Bible reading among their weekly activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall promotion of 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 109,483 square miles and a population estimated at 12.2 million in 2001. The Catholic Episcopal Conference estimated that 85 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, with 35 percent of Catholics actively practicing. Some groups, particularly indigenous people who lived in the mountains, followed a syncretic form of Catholicism that combined indigenous beliefs with orthodox Catholic doctrine. Saints often were venerated in ways similar to indigenous deities. In the Amazonian jungle region, Catholic practices were often combined with elements of shamanism.

The Evangelical Missionary Union estimated that there were one million Protestants in the country. While Protestant conversions traditionally have been among the lower classes, there were 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 have successfully found 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 included the Assembly of God in urban areas and the Church of the Word of God, which was growing rapidly in indigenous areas. In general, rural indigenous areas tended to be either entirely Catholic or entirely Protestant.

Hundreds of evangelical churches existed, and many of them were not connected 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 sixty years.

Many of the religious groups registered with the Government had very small numbers; these included Anglicans, Baha'is, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and the Unification Church. Other groups present in small numbers were Muslims, Jews, and adherents of Eastern Orthodox religions. There were 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 big cities, Protestant mega-churches, with more than ten thousand members, were a growing phenomenon. There was 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 foreign missionary groups working in the country included Southern Baptists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Pentecostals. Other missionaries were nondenominational or affiliated with independent churches.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 the faith of their choice freely, in public or in private; the only limits are "those proscribed by law to protect and respect the diversity, plurality, security, and rights of others." The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion.

The Government 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 useful when entering into contracts. Any religious organization wishing to register with the Government must possess a charter and be in nonprofit status, include all names used by the group (to ensure that names of previously registered groups are not used without their permission), and provide signatures of at least fifteen 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 worked to standardize 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. However, there were some schools offering religious instruction that received both private funds from the Catholic Church and public funds from the Ministry of Education.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

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

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and civil society as part of its overall efforts to promote human rights. U.S. embassy staff met with leaders of numerous religious communities, including representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, and Protestant groups, to monitor the status of religious freedom in the country.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 8,108 square miles and an estimated population of approximately 6.7 million. The country was 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 practiced an indigenous religion.

According to a 2003 survey by the Technological University Public Opinion Center, approximately 57.1 percent of the population was Roman Catholic. Additionally, 21.2 percent were members of Protestant churches. (Among Protestants, informal church estimates suggested approximately 35 percent were Baptists and members of Assemblies of God.) Members of Jehovah's Witnesses accounted for an estimated 1.9 percent of the population, 0.7 percent were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2.3 percent were associated with other churches and religious groups, and 16.8 percent were not affiliated with any church or religion.

Several missionary groups were active, including Mormon, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Assembly of God.

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.

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 as holidays for public employees, and each year the legislative assembly issues a decree establishing Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday as official holidays for the private sector.

The constitution explicitly recognizes the Roman Catholic Church and grants it legal status. In addition, the law governing nonprofit organizations and foundations states that such groups may register for official status. A religious group is not required to register with the Government but must do so if it wants to 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 to a group, 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 government gazette.

The law for nonprofit organizations and foundations charges the Ministry of Governance with registering, regulating, and overseeing the finances of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), non-Catholic churches, and other religious groups in the country. The law specifically exempts unions, cooperatives, and the Catholic Church. During the period covered by this report, there were 118 requests for new registration, of which 94 were approved, 22 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 seeking actively to promote a church or religion must obtain a special residence visa for religious activities. Visitors to the country are not allowed to proselytize while on a visitor or tourist visa. There were no allegations of difficulties in obtaining visas for religious activities during the period covered by this report.

Public education is secular. Private religious schools operate freely in the country. All private schools, whether religious or secular, must meet the same standards to be approved by the Ministry of Education.

The 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to the free practice of religion. On January 23, 2006, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders founded the Council of Religions for Peace. Leaders of the Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, evangelical, Muslim, 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. During the period covered by this report, the embassy sponsored three U.S. scholars in their studies of the small Jewish community, the Anglican Church and its work in social justice, and Catholic religious artwork in the country.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, including Carriacou and Petite Martinique, has an area of 133 square miles and a population of slightly more than 100,000. Approximately 93,000 persons live on the island of Grenada, 7,000 on Carriacou, and 900 on Petite Martinique. Sixty-four percent of the general population was Roman Catholic, 22 percent was Anglican, 3 percent Methodist, and 3 percent Seventh-day Adventist. Other denominations included Presbyterian, Church of God, Baptist, Pentecostal, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Mennonite. There were an estimated 5,000 Rastafarians. There were also approximately 500 Muslims, including foreign medical students at St. George's University, and an estimated 150 Baha'is.

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.

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

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

Hurricane Ivan damaged 98 percent of the churches on the island in 2004. Faith-based organizations worked together to repair or refurbish most of the damaged churches; however, at the end of the period covered by this report, the largest in St. George's remained roofless.

SECTION IV. U.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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, traditional Mayan leaders continued to report discrimination from some nongovernmental sources.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 42,043 square miles and a population of approximately 12.7 million. Official census data indicated that the country's indigenous population was 43 percent, although unofficial estimates were higher.

Historically, the country has been overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. However, in recent decades Protestant groups have gained a significant number of members. Although there was no accurate census of religious affiliation, some sources estimated that between 50 and 60 percent of the population was Catholic and approximately 40 percent was Protestant, primarily evangelical. Leaders of Mayan spiritual organizations maintained that many indigenous Catholics and some Protestants also practiced some form of indigenous spiritual ritual. The largest Protestant denomination was the Full Gospel Church, followed by the Assembly of God, the Central American Church, and the Prince of Peace Church. Other Protestant denominations included Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Episcopalian, as well as many independent evangelical denominations. Other religious groups were represented, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, and, primarily in the capital, small communities of Jews and Muslims. Few citizens considered themselves atheists. There were no accurate statistics on church attendance, although various sources reported that it was very high in the evangelical community and somewhat lower among Catholics.

Catholic and Protestant churches were distributed throughout the country, and their adherents were distributed among all major ethnic groups and political parties.

U.S. and Latin American Christian missionaries worked in both religious and social capacities, although there were no reliable statistics as to their 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.

There is no state religion; however, the constitution recognizes explicitly the distinct legal personality of the Catholic Church.

The Government does not establish requirements for religious recognition, nor does it impose registration requirements for religious members to worship together. The Government requires religious congregations as well as nonreligious associations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register as legal entities if they wish to transact business. Such legal recognition is necessary, among other things, for a congregation to rent or purchase premises, enter into contracts, and enjoy tax†exempt status. The Government does not charge religious groups a registration fee.

The Catholic Church does not have to register as a legal entity; it is so recognized in the constitution. Any other congregation may file a copy of its bylaws and a list of its initial membership with the Ministry of Government to receive formal recognition. The congregation must have at least twenty-five initial members, and the bylaws must reflect an intention to pursue religious or spiritual objectives. Applications are rejected only if the organization does not appear to be devoted to a religious objective, appears to be in pursuit of illegal activities, or engages in activities that appear likely to threaten the public order. There were no reports that the Government rejected any group's application during the period covered by this report; however, Protestant leaders reported that their churches have found the process lengthy (lasting from six months to several years), and they estimated that, due to these difficulties, 8,000 Protestant churches in the country either had not applied for registration or had not completed the process.

Foreign missionaries are required to obtain tourist visas, which are issued for renewable periods of three months. After renewing their tourist visa once, they may apply for temporary residence. Specific missionary visas are not issued or required.

The Government does not subsidize religious groups, and no groups reported receiving national funding. The constitution permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. There is no national framework for determining the nature or content of religious instruction in public schools. Accordingly, when provided, such instruction tends to be programmed at the local level. During the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Education consulted with the Catholic Church and Protestant groups on the integration of general values, although not specific religious teachings, into school curricula.

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.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Leaders of the Catholic, evangelical Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim communities reported that complaints from their followers of discrimination based on religion were rare.

The ecumenical movement was 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 (the former meets every two to three months, the latter irregularly) to communicate primarily on social and political topics.

Evangelical Protestant churches were split between a majority group, which avoided ecumenical engagement with other religious traditions, including Roman Catholicism and Mayan religious practices, and a minority group, which actively promoted an ecumenical and multicultural viewpoint.

Indigenous people historically have been dominated by ladinos (citizens of mixed European and indigenous descent) and generally have not participated fully in the mainstream of social, economic, and political activity.

Mayan religious leaders continued to note widespread disagreements with evangelical Protestants, and to a lesser extent, charismatic Catholics. Protestant churches historically have been less tolerant of indigenous practices than the Catholic

Church, whose approach in many areas of the country is to tolerate traditional practice not directly in conflict with Catholic dogma. During the Spanish colonial period, some Catholic churches were built on sacred Mayan sites. Mayan leaders reported that in a few areas of the country Catholic priests have forbidden followers of Mayan spirituality access to these sites.

Although many members of evangelical congregations are indigenous, some local evangelical leaders have denounced traditional religious practices as "witchcraft" or "devil worship" and have discouraged their indigenous members from being involved with traditional religious practices.

SECTION IV. U.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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Despite ethnic tensions, the generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 83,000 square miles and a population of approximately 751,000. The country is religiously and ethnically diverse. Nearly half of the population could trace its ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, and more than one-third of the population was of African descent. These two ethnicities, along with smaller native South American groups and persons of European and Chinese descent, practiced a wide range of religions.

Data from a 2002 census on religious affiliation indicated that approximately 57 percent of the population was Christian, including the following faiths: 17 percent Pentecostal, 8 percent Roman Catholic, 7 percent Anglican, 5 percent Seventh-day Adventist, and 20 percent other Christian faiths. Approximately 28 percent was Hindu, an estimated 7 percent was Muslim (both Sunni and Shi'a), and 2 percent practiced other beliefs, including Rastafarianism and Baha'ism. Approximately 4 percent of the population did not profess any religion.

Members of all ethnic groups were well represented in all religious groups, with two exceptions: Almost all Hindus were Indo-Guyanese, and nearly all Rastafarians were Afro-Guyanese. Foreign missionaries from a wide range of denominations were 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.

Members of all religious groups were allowed to worship freely. There is no state or otherwise dominant religion, and the Government practiced no form of religious favoritism or discrimination.

The Government recognizes religious groups of all faiths present in the country. All such groups are required to register with the Government to receive formal recognition. Religious groups seeking to establish operations require permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs before commencing their activities. This permission does not allow access to the interior; for such access, all nonofficial persons not resident in the interior require special permission from the Ministries of Home Affairs and of Amerindian Affairs. The ministries review the scope of proposed activities

submitted by a religious body and grant approval on a case-by-case basis. There is no formal monitoring of religious groups.

The following holy days are national holidays: Christian—Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas; Hindu—Phagwah and Diwali; Muslim—the Birth of the Prophet Muhammad and Eid Al-Adha.

Both public and religiously affiliated schools exist, and parents are free to send their children to the school of their choice without sanction or restriction. The Government imposes no requirements regarding religion for any official or nonofficial purposes.

The Government promoted cooperation among religious communities to address long-standing racial tensions. In early 2004 the president announced that the Government would provide financial support, including no-cost spectrum on the radio frequency band, for an all-faith television station. The Inter-Religious Organization (IRO), a nongovernmental umbrella organization for Christian, Hindu, and Muslim organizations, was mandated to work out the modalities for establishing such a station. The IRO's activities were somewhat limited due to infrequent meetings, and not all denominations were represented in its voluntary membership. At the end of the period covered by this report, the IRO had completed a proposal for an all-faith television station, but the Government had not acted on it.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Guyana Defense Force (GDF) did not have a chaplaincy; however, efforts were made to coordinate with civilian religious groups to provide personnel with access to religious services. Leaders of all major faiths provided prayer and counseling, although generally only Christian sermons were given on GDF bases. Attendance at religious services depended on the discretion of individual commanders, although in many cases it was mandatory. Membership in a particular religion did not confer any advantage or disadvantage; however, general military practice tended to be biased in favor of Christians. For example, no allowance was made for Muslim observance of Friday as a special prayer day, nor was provision made for Hindu dietary preferences.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Although significant problems existed between the country's two main ethnic groups, tensions were generally racially, not religiously, based. Religious leaders frequently have worked together to attempt to bridge these differences. Despite its limitations, the IRO took a prominent role in trying to reduce tensions in the period before the 2006 national elections. It organized a peace march that took place on January 16, 2006, and a code of conduct for the parties contesting the elections to sign on May 2, 2006.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. ambassador and other embassy officials met on numerous occasions with leaders of religious groups and with foreign missionaries. The embassy continued to pursue a policy of active engagement with the Islamic community. The ambassador and other embassy officials spoke before various religious groups promoting religious and racial harmony.

HAITI

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and 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 was Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent was 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 practiced voodoo alongside Christianity (most commonly with Catholicism) and considered Christianity their primary religion. While the Government officially recognized voodoo as a religion in 2003, it continued 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 list of members of the religious organization, and a list of social projects of the organization. Registered religious groups are required to submit an annual report of their activities to the bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered with the ministry. 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 churches and missionaries are exempted from customs duties, and registered churches are not taxed. Some church organizations have complained that customs officials sometimes refused to honor a church's tax-exempt status; however, it appeared that these refusals generally were attempts by corrupt officials to extort bribes rather than to limit religious practices.

For many years Roman Catholicism was the official religion of the country. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 constitution, neither the Government nor the Holy See has renounced the 1860 concordat, which continues to serve as the basis for relations between the Catholic Church and the state, as well as for the operation of Catholic religious orders. In many respects, Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religions. Official and quasi-official functions are held in Catholic churches and cathedrals, such as "Te Deum" Masses for Independence Day, Flag Day, and Founders Day. However, in the past several years the Government has recognized the growing role of Protestant churches. For example, Protestant and Episcopal clergy and voodoo practitioners have been

invited to participate when the religious sector is asked to play an advisory role in politics.

Many foreign missionaries are affiliated with U.S.-based denominations or individual churches. Others are associated with independent, nondenominational Christian groups. Missionary groups operate hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics throughout the country. According to a 2004 survey, eighty-three religious groups sent temporary missions on a regular basis to participate in relief and humanitarian activities.

Foreign missionaries enter on regular tourist visas and submit paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to register with the Bureau of Religious Affairs. While some missionaries were concerned by the slowness of the Government to issue residence permits, there was no indication that the delay was due to obstructionism.

The constitution stipulates that persons cannot be required to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions. Therefore, in Catholic or Protestant parochial schools, the school authorities may not permit proselytization on behalf of the church with which they are affiliated.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Religion plays a prominent role in society. Many citizens display a keen interest in religious matters and freely express their religious beliefs.

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 that flourish, Christian attitudes toward voodoo varied. Many Christians accept voodoo as part of the country's culture, but others regard it as incompatible with Christianity. This difference in views led to isolated instances of conflict in the past; however, no such instances were reported during the period covered by this report. The Bureau of Religious Affairs managed periodic tension between some Protestant and voodoo groups effectively. Tensions between Protestant and voodoo groups were local in nature and usually involved land disputes or conflicts over proselytizing. In some cases, the bureau sends representatives to assist local authorities in settling such disputes. The parties in conflict usually accept the ministry's mediating role.

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. Several Catholic priests remained among the leadership of the Fanmi Lavalas party of past president Jean Bertrand Aristide, a former Catholic priest. The Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Protestant Federation occasionally issued statements on political matters.

Particularly in rural areas, past accusations of sorcery were known to lead to mob violence resulting in deaths. Women generally were targeted in these cases, which usually were precipitated by the death of a child from unknown causes. In view of the prevalence of voodoo in rural areas, it appeared likely that voodoo practitioners were targeted in some of these cases, although no examples were reported during the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their cooperation in the political process. The Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Protestant Federation, and the Episcopal Church each had a seat on the Provisional Electoral Council, with which the embassy worked regularly as the council prepared for and conducted elections from February to April 2006.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 43,278 square miles and a population of approximately seven million. An estimated 90 percent of the population was mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), with small numbers of Amerindians (approximately 7 percent); persons of European, African, Asian, and Arab descent made up the rest.

There were no reliable government statistics on the distribution of membership in churches. The Roman Catholic Church reported a total membership of slightly more than 80 percent of the population. In a 2002 survey, the Le Vote Harris reported that 63 percent of respondents identified themselves as Catholics, 23 percent as evangelical Protestant Christians, and 14 percent as "other" or provided no answer. Anecdotal evidence and unreleased poll results suggested that the number of Protestant, including evangelical, Christians appeared to be growing to more than one-quarter of the population. The principal religious groups included 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 included the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission churches. The National Association of Evangelical Pastors represented the evangelical leadership. There were significant numbers of Christian missionaries from the United States. There were small numbers of Muslims and Jews. There was a mosque and a synagogue in San Pedro Sula and a synagogue in Tegucigalpa.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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. 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. Two of the prominent evangelical Protestant churches were represented on the board of the National Council of Anticorruption.

The Christian holy days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas are national holidays.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. The constitution grants the president the power to grant "juridical personality" to associations, including religious organizations. This status is a prerequisite to being accorded certain rights and privileges, such as tax exemptions. Associations are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group of leaders from the Evangelical Fraternity of Churches for review. This group has the power to suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications also are referred to the Solicitor General's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The president signs the approved resolutions granting juridical personality. There were no reports that the Ministry of Government and Justice turned down any such application submitted by a religious group during the period covered by this report. The Catholic Church and other recognized religious organizations are accorded tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty on imports.

The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. The ministry generally grants such permits.

There are religious schools that provide professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provide general education, such as parochial schools. They receive no special treatment from the Government, nor do they face any restrictions.

The law allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud. There were no known cases of deportation under this law during the period covered by this report. In the fall of 2005, the Government issued a regulatory announcement to the application of Article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony that the press characterized as a crackdown on witchcraft in the countryside. (There is a longstanding tradition in the countryside of folk healers and fortune-tellers.) During the end of the period covered by this report, there were no complaints that the measure constituted a violation of freedom of religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

In 2000 the Congress adopted a controversial measure requiring that, beginning in 2001, all school classes begin with ten minutes of readings from the Bible. However, at the end of the period covered by this report, the legislation had not been put into effect.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic Church designated the archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the archbishop has established an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue section within his archdiocese.

There were a few reports of discriminatory popular attitudes against persons of Arab descent, both first-generation immigrants and those whose families have resided in the country for generations. These attitudes occasionally resulted in negative media coverage of Islam and in unsubstantiated public statements by government officials linking Arab citizens to terrorist activities; this occurred despite the fact that most Arabs in the country were 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 during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 4,244 square miles and a population of approximately 2.7 million. According to the most recent census (2001), the population's religious affiliation was: Church of God, 24 percent; Seventh-day Adventist, 11 percent; Pen-

tecostal, 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.

Shortly after being sworn into office at the end of March 2006, 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 faiths could be eligible for appointment. Some criticized the initiative as an attempt to curry favor with Christians rather than as a practical proposal for effective government. Other critics argued that persons should be appointed to boards based on their expertise rather than their religious affiliation.

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 the police actions reflected religious discrimination or were due to the group's illegal use of marijuana, which is an element of Rastafarian religious practice. In 2003 a parliamentary joint select committee on marijuana recommended decriminalization of possession of small quantities for adult personal use in private. Parliament considered the committee's recommendations but took no further action. In April 2006 the Senate passed a resolution to have the committee reconvene and conclude its deliberations, but by the end of the period covered by this report the committee had not met.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 in certain areas.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Federal Government continued to strengthen efforts to promote interfaith understanding and dialogue and to mediate cases of religious intolerance.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, in certain areas, particularly in the south, political, cultural, and religious tensions continued to limit the free practice of religion within some communities. Most such incidents occurred in the state of Chiapas, but government officials, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and evangelical and Roman Catholic representatives agreed that the roots of these conflicts sometimes lay in political, ethnic, or land disputes.

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,220,663 square miles and a population of approximately 107 million.

According to the Government's 2000 census, approximately 88 percent of respondents identified themselves as at least nominally Roman Catholic. There were an estimated 11,000 Catholic churches and 14,000 ordained Catholic priests and nuns. An additional estimated 90,000 laypersons worked in the Catholic Church system. Other religious groups for which the 2000 census provided estimates included evangelicals (including Pentecostals, neopentecostals, and Pentecostal Roots, which in turn included Live God Church, Truth Column and Support, and the World's Light), with 1.71 percent of the population; other Protestant evangelical groups, 2.79 percent; members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1.25 percent; "historical" Protestants (defined by the Government as Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Del Nazareno, Mennonites, and others), 0.71 percent; Seventh-day Adventists, 0.58 percent; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 0.25 percent; Jews, 0.05 percent; and other religions, 0.31 percent. Approximately 3.52 percent of respondents indicated "no religion," and 0.86 percent did not specify a religion.

There were no definitive statistics on membership in various Protestant denominations. A 2000 press report indicated that Presbyterians accounted for 1 percent of the total population, Anglicans 0.1 percent, Baptists 0.1 percent, Methodists 0.04 percent, and Lutherans 0.01 percent. Official figures sometimes differed from membership claims of religious groups. For example, the Seventh†day Adventist Church claimed a nationwide membership of 600,000 to 700,000 persons; however, according to the 2000 census, only 488,945 persons identified themselves as such. Also according to the 2000 census, 205,229 persons identified themselves as Mormons, whereas the Mormon Church claimed a nationwide membership of approximately 1.2 million. Some Protestant evangelical groups claimed that their coreligionists constituted close to 60 percent of the population in Chiapas; however, in the 2000 census only 21.9 percent of respondents in that state identified themselves as Protestant. The exact number of evangelical and Protestant churches and pastors was unknown, but as of May 31, 2006, the Director for Religious Associations of the Federal Secretariat of Government (DAR) had registered 3,404 evangelical and 79 Protestant associations.

Non-Catholic Christians were concentrated primarily in the south. Chiapas State, with a large indigenous population and approximately 4 percent of the country's population, had the largest percentage of non-Catholics, 36.2 percent, compared to the national average, estimated at 12 percent. Non-Catholics represented 29.6 percent of the population of Tabasco State, followed by Campeche State with 28.7 percent, and Quintana Roo State with 26.8 percent.

The Jewish community claimed approximately 50,000 members; by far the largest number lived in Mexico City, although there also were organized congregations in Guadalajara, Monterrey, Tijuana, and Cancun. There was a small Muslim population in the city of Torreon, Coahuila, and there were an estimated 300 Muslims in the San Cristobal de las Casas area in Chiapas. Some indigenous people in the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatan practiced a syncretic religion that mixed Catholic and pre-Hispanic Mayan religious beliefs.

In some communities, particularly in the south, there was a correlation between politics and religion. A small number of local leaders often reportedly manipulated 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 Federal Government generally respected this right in practice; however, there were some restrictions. State and municipal governments generally protected this right, but some local officials, 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 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 DAR as a religious association. The registration process is routine. The most recent statistics showed that 6,585 religious associations were registered, of which the vast majority were evangelical Protestant or Catholic. During the period covered by this report, the DAR registered 213 associations, some of which had applied for registration previously. In addition, at the end of the period covered by this report, 360 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.

In April 2005 the DAR revoked the registry of MEX–USA for changing its statutes, the first revocation since the establishment of the law of religious associations. While having originally registered as a Catholic organization, MEX–USA later incorporated members who worshipped the Saint of Death (Santa Muerte). During the period covered by this report, the members of the organization continued to meet and worship informally as an unregistered religious group.

The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, which the DAR fined in April 2005 for profiting from its activities, continued to operate, although it reportedly no longer conditioned promises of salvation on the receipt of donations in particular amounts.

The DAR promotes religious tolerance and investigates cases of religious intolerance. All religious associations have equal access to the DAR for registering complaints. Its officials generally are responsive and helpful in mediating disputes among religious communities. When parties present a religious dispute to the DAR, it attempts to mediate a solution. If mediation fails, the parties may submit the problem to the DAR for binding arbitration. If the parties do not agree to this procedure, one or the other may elect to seek judicial redress. Municipal and state officials generally are responsive and helpful in mediating disputes among communities. However, when a mediated solution cannot be found, officials have not always been aggressive in pursuing legal remedies against offending local leaders (see section III).

Five states—Chiapas, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Veracruz, and Mexico State—have their own under secretaries for religious affairs. In Nuevo Leon the position of Under Secretary for Citizens' Services includes Religious Affairs as part of the portfolio.

Of eight 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.

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.

Missionaries representing a wide variety of groups were 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

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 work of religious clergy in public institutions such as jails or hospitals is neither explicitly prohibited nor supported by law.

Religious associations must notify the Government of their intent to hold a religious meeting outside of a licensed place of worship. Thousands of notifications are typically submitted every year. The Government routinely approves such requests.

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.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Federal Government generally respects religious freedom in practice; however, poor enforcement mechanisms allowed local authorities 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. In parts of Chiapas, leaders of indigenous communities sometimes regarded evangelical groups and Catholic lay catechists as unwelcome outside influences and as potential economic and political threats. As a result, these leaders sometimes acquiesced in or ordered the harassment or expulsion of individuals belonging chiefly to Protestant evangelical groups. The DAR estimated that 15 percent of reported religious conflicts—115 since the beginning of the Fox administration in 2000—were abuses by local authorities. Often these authorities were unpaid officials of small, rural municipalities. Religious differences frequently were the cited feature of such incidents; however, the disputes frequently involved several underlying factors, including ethnic differences, land disputes, and struggles over local political and economic power. In past years, expulsions involved burning of homes and crops, beatings, and, occasionally, killings. During the period covered by this report, there were no known deaths in incidents that had a religious dimension. These incidents usually occurred in predominantly Catholic-Mayan communities, and they mostly involved Catholics harassing or abusing evangelicals or other Protestants. On several occasions, village officials imposed sanctions on evangelicals for resisting participation in community festivals or refusing to work on Saturdays.

The Chiapas-based Evangelical Commission for the Defense of Human Rights (CEDEH) claimed that municipal authorities have expelled 30,000 persons from their communities in the last thirty years. Some of these persons were displaced at least partly on religious grounds. A representative from the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) reported that there were no official statistics on the displaced. However, the Diagnostic on Human Rights in Mexico, published in 2003 by the representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, cited religious conflict as one of the principal reasons for internal displacement in Chiapas.

In August 2005 members of the Huichol ethnic group belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist, Baptist, and Apostolic Churches were driven from their homes in the community of Agua Fria, Mezquitic Municipality, Jalisco. Village leaders charged that evangelicals did not follow community by-laws, which require partaking in native religious practices, including the use of liquor and peyote. Most Huichol practiced these native customs alongside Catholicism. According to press reports, at least 120 persons fled their homes and sought refuge in the neighboring state of Nayarit. According to the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, many of those who fled settled in Nayarit permanently, while others intended to return to their village in Jalisco. Local authorities in Jalisco denied charges of religious intolerance and referred to the conflict as a land dispute.

In October 2005 an estimated forty families (approximately 150 persons) were threatened with expulsion from the village of San Nicolas, Ixmiquilpan Munici-

pality, in the state of Hidalgo, allegedly for defying the "customs of th[e] town." According to press reports, during an August 28 town assembly it was decided not to permit evangelicals in the town. In November the governor of Hidalgo and officials from the Secretariat of Government met with representatives of the evangelical families and publicly reassured them of their safety and right to remain. Although a formal resolution had not been reached by the end of the period covered by this report, tension in the community had decreased, and newly elected local officials were reportedly more accommodating of religious differences. While a dispute concerning official permission for the construction of an evangelical church had not been resolved, construction materials were reportedly located at the building site.

According to a Chiapas newspaper, Cuarto Poder, in November 2005 an evangelical leader in Santa Rita, La Trinitaria Municipality, denounced a series of attacks on local evangelicals, including assaults, vandalism, and land seizures. A representative of Jehovah's Witnesses reported that one of its members in Santa Rita had been incarcerated on several occasions for not participating in Catholic feast days. Local authorities seized his farmland, distributed it to other villagers, and threatened to evict him from the community. The State Directorate for Religious Affairs in Chiapas, however, categorized this situation as a land dispute, and legal proceedings were underway to resolve the problem.

By the end of the period covered by this report, the Tojolabal Christian families who fled their homes in 2004 after being attacked by a mob including local officials linked to the Democratic Revolution Party had not returned. The families joined approximately 300 to 400 Tojolabal Christians expelled from their farms in Las Margaritas Township in the previous ten months.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there continued to be cases of alleged religious intolerance and expulsions from certain indigenous communities. This was particularly common in Chiapas, where many residents follow unique and centuries-old syncretistic (Catholic-Mayan) religious practices and beliefs. Endemic poverty, land tenure disputes, and lack of educational opportunities also contributed to tensions in many communities, which at times have resulted in violence.

The most common incidents of intolerance related to traditional community celebrations. Protestant evangelicals often resisted making financial donations demanded by community norms that go partly to local celebrations of Catholic religious holidays, and they also resisted participating in festivals involving alcohol. News reports estimated that 10,000 evangelical Christians lived in segregated areas surrounding San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas.

On March 14, 2006, Obeth Lorenzana Velazquez was convicted of murder and sentenced to twenty-five years' imprisonment for the 2003 killing of pastor Jairo Solis Lopez, from the Chiapas municipality of Mapastepec. He confessed that the crime was related to a personal quarrel. From the beginning of the investigation, the attorney general ruled out motivation for religious reasons, and the under Secretary for Religious Affairs in Chiapas did not challenge this conclusion.

At the end of the period covered by this report, two men detained for the 2003 killing of evangelical Christian pastor Mariano Diaz Mendez, near the town of San Juan Chamula in Chiapas, had not been tried. They confessed that the crime was politically motivated. The attorney general ruled out motivation for religious reasons, and the Under Secretary for Religious Affairs in Chiapas did not challenge this conclusion.

In Chiapas traditionalist local leaders have denied approximately 150 children access to the local public schools in six indigenous communities every year since 1994 because they are evangelicals. 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 October 2005, during contentious contract negotiations, demonstrators supporting workers of the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) put up signs and painted graffiti at the IMSS headquarters that included swastikas and anti-Semitic slurs in reference to IMSS Director Santiago Levy. The incident was condemned by public figures, including President Fox and Secretary of Government Carlos

Abascal. The leadership of the IMSS workers' union disavowed the action, and approximately 300 of its members were required to take a tolerance sensitivity course.

The DAR reported that since the beginning of the Fox administration in 2000, it had received 115 reports of conflicts related to religious intolerance in the country and that 93 such conflicts had been resolved. Government officials, the national human rights ombudsman, and interfaith groups continued to conduct discussions about incidents of intolerance to promote social peace. An Interfaith Council included representatives from the Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Mormon, Lutheran, other Protestant, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh Dharma, and Sufi Islam 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. U.S. embassy representatives discussed these issues with the government offices for religious affairs and human rights on federal and state levels. Embassy officers also met with members of religious groups and NGOs, including the chair of the human rights committee for an interfaith council and NGOs for freedom of religion and conscience.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 49,998 square miles and a population of approximately 5.5 million. More than 90 percent of the population belonged to Christian groups. According to a 1995 census, 72.9 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, 15.1 percent was evangelical Protestant, 1.5 percent belonged to the Moravian Church, and 0.1 percent was Episcopalian. Another 1.9 percent was associated with other religious groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Amish and Mennonite communities, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Approximately 8.5 percent professed no religious affiliation or were atheists. The Episcopal Church claimed a membership nearly twice that indicated in the census, and evangelical churches also made credible claims of higher current membership ranging between 20 and 30 percent of the population.

According to a March 2005 CID-Gallup poll, 57 percent of respondents were Catholic, 29 percent were members of evangelical or other Protestant churches, 3 percent belonged to other groups, and 11 percent claimed no religious affiliation.

Non-Christian communities were few and small. The Jewish community counted fewer than fifty persons (including expatriates). They gathered for religious holidays and Sabbath dinners but did not have an ordained rabbi or a synagogue. In March the Jewish community established the Israelite Community of Nicaragua with a board of directors. The new organization aimed to eventually reestablish a synagogue in Nicaragua and was seeking a rabbi. According to community members, the last synagogue was firebombed by the Sandinistas in 1978.

There were approximately 1,200 Muslims, mostly Sunnis and primarily resident aliens or naturalized citizens from Iran, Libya, and Palestine who immigrated in the 1980s. There was a mosque and an Islamic cultural center in Managua, the capital, with approximately 200 members.

Minority religious groups also included the Baha'i Faith and the Church of Scientology. Other immigrant groups included Turcos, Palestinian Christians whose ancestors came to Central America in the early 1900s, and Chinese, who either arrived as Christians or frequently intermarried with citizens and converted to Christianity.

There 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 fre-

quently incorporates syncretic elements and does not criticize or interfere with pre-Colombian aspects of Christian religious festivals.

Moravian and Episcopal communities were concentrated on the Atlantic coast, while Catholic and evangelical churches dominated the Pacific and central regions. There was a strong correlation between ethnicity and religion; blacks and Amerindians, who generally lived along the Atlantic coast, were more likely to belong to the Moravian or Episcopal Church. Some evangelical churches focused on the remote towns of the central South Atlantic Region and had a strong presence there.

Evangelical churches were growing rapidly, particularly in poor or remote areas. In 1980 the Assemblies of God had 80 churches and fewer than 5,000 members, but according to Church leader Saturnino Cerrato, as of April 2006 there were more than 860 churches and 200,000 baptized members. The evangelical churches operated two private universities without interference from the Government.

Anecdotal evidence pointed to proportionally higher church attendance among members of the new evangelical churches than in Catholic and traditional Protestant churches. In poorer neighborhoods, the small evangelical churches were filled to capacity nearly every evening. According to a Catholic official, the Catholic Church was growing numerically but losing ground proportionally.

Foreign missionaries were active. The Mormons had 191 missionaries and 42,000 members in the country, and the Mennonites had a handful of missionary families and close to 8,000 members, mostly in the central Boaco region and rural areas around Waslala in the north. Nearly all of the non-Catholic denominations had at least one missionary family present.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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, the Catholic Church enjoys a close relationship with the Government. It is the most politically active religious group and has significant political influence. Catholic Church leaders routinely meet with senior government officials. There were allegations that state funds have been used to support purely religious Catholic Church activities; however, under the current administration the Government and Catholic Church maintained more distant relations. The historical position of the Church is such that most religiously affiliated monuments, memorials, and holidays are Catholic-related. However, the dominance of the Catholic Church 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, 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 nongovernmental organizations. A church must apply for personeria juridica (legal standing), which the National Assembly must approve. Following approval, a church must register with the Ministry of Government as an association or a foundation. Groups that do not register cannot obtain tax-exempt status and technically do not have standing to incur legal obligations and make contracts. However, a number of groups did not register and continued to operate without penalty.

A recognized church may be granted tax-exempt status, known as exoneration. Because of perceived unequal treatment for different religious groups, exoneration was a contentious issue. This was particularly true with regard to exemption from customs duties on imported goods donated for humanitarian purposes. Goods donated to established churches and other nonprofit religious organizations recognized by the Government that are intended for the exclusive use of the church or organization are eligible for exoneration. Groups must receive clearance from the Office of External Cooperation, the Ministry of Finance, the Customs Office, and the municipality in which the donated goods would be used before a tax exemption is approved and the goods are released.

In the past some churches and other nonprofit religious organizations, among them the Assemblies of God, reported bureaucratic delays in obtaining customs exemptions, and some complained that the Catholic Church received preferential

treatment and did not face the same requirements applied to other religious and humanitarian organizations. However, some Catholic groups, including Catholic Relief Services, reported similar bureaucratic problems in obtaining customs exemptions. A 2003 tax equity law, designed to facilitate the exoneration process, required all groups to requalify for exoneration. Many churches and other nonprofit religious organizations reported that the law generally streamlined the process in practice; 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 did not face special entry requirements other than obtaining religious worker visas, which were routinely provided. During the period covered by this report, there were no reports of difficulties in obtaining religious worker visas. 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 in the country. The Government provides financial support to a number of Catholic primary and secondary schools by paying teacher salaries.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Relations among religious groups differed between the two coasts. On the Atlantic side, where the three dominant churches were the Moravian, Episcopal, and Catholic, there was an ecumenical spirit, which many observers attributed to the long history and mutual respect of the three predominant Christian groups on the Atlantic side of the country. However, on the Pacific side, ecumenism was rare, and there was continuing and energetic competition for adherents between the Catholic and evangelical churches.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy continued to maintain a regular dialogue with the principal religious leaders and organizations.

PANAMA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, with some qualifications, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 30,193 square miles and a population of approximately 3.2 million. The Government does not collect statistics on the religious affiliation of its citizens, but various sources estimated that 80 to 85 percent of the population identified itself as Roman Catholic and 15 percent as evangelical Christian. A 2003 CID-Gallup poll indicated that approximately 24 percent of the adult population was evangelical Christian. Smaller religious groups included 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 mem-

bers each, Hindus, Buddhists, and other Christians. The Baha'is maintained one of the world's seven Baha'i Houses of Worship in the country. Indigenous religions included Ibeorgun (among Kuna) and Mamatata (among Ngobe). There was also a small number of Rastafarians.

Members of the Catholic faith were found throughout the country and at all levels of society. Evangelical Christians also were dispersed geographically and were becoming more prominent in society. The mainstream Protestant denominations, which included Southern Baptist Convention and other Baptist congregations, United Methodist, Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas, and Lutheran, derived their membership from the Antillean black and the expatriate communities, both of which were concentrated in Panama and Colon Provinces. The Jewish community was concentrated largely in Panama City. Muslims lived primarily in Panama City and Colon, with smaller but growing concentrations in David and other provincial cities. The vast majority of Muslims were of Lebanese, Palestinian, or Indian descent.

Several religious organizations had foreign religious workers in the country. The Mormon Church had the largest number. Lutherans, the Southern Baptist Convention, Seventh-day Adventists, and Episcopalians each had a much smaller number of missionaries; many were from other Latin American countries.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, provided that "Christian morality and public order" are respected, and the Government generally 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 it 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 temporary three-month missionary worker visas. A one-year extension customarily is granted, but one religious group complained that the extension could take up to four months. Foreign missionaries who intend to remain longer than fifteen 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 five-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 religions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The constitution limits the type of public offices that religious leaders may hold to those related to social assistance, education, or scientific research.

During the period covered by this report, the Ombudsman's Office mediated the case of four Rastafarian children denied access to public school because they refused to cut their hair. A similar complaint occurred in the previous period. According to the ombudsman, the children were allowed to return to school without having to cut their hair.

A Protestant group reported that the Government had been selectively applying the requirements for religious worker visas to favor some groups over others. The Protestant and other groups complained to the Government, and by the end of the period covered by this report, officials had resolved the problem.

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

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

Christian groups, including the Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, and Eastern Orthodox churches, participated in a successful ecumenical movement directed by the nongovernmental Panamanian Ecumenical Committee. The committee members also had 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.

The U.S. embassy continued its outreach efforts to the Muslim communities by hosting two dinners at the ambassador's residence to observe Islamic holy days and two meetings to discuss problems encountered at U.S. airports by Muslims. In addition, an embassy delegation visited the Arab community center and mosque in Colon.

The ambassador hosted a Purim dinner for the Jewish community, and embassy officials attended Holocaust remembrance services. They also took part in events marking the visit of the Patriarch of Constantinople to Panama's Eastern Orthodox community. The ambassador and embassy officers met with world leaders of the Jewish B'nai B'rith organization who were in the country in June 2006 for their annual conference.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 157,047 square miles and an estimated population of 6.3 million. According to the Government's 2002 national census, the population was 89.6 percent Roman Catholic, 6.2 percent evangelical Christian, 1.1 percent other Christian, 0.6 percent indigenous religions, and 0.3 percent other (non-Christian) religions; 1.1 percent of respondents claimed no religious preference, and 1 percent did not provide information regarding their religious preference.

There were active Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Jewish (Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Baha'i communities. There was an Islamic community concentrated in the department of Alto Parana, an area that received substantial immigration from the Middle East, particularly from Lebanon. There was also a substantial Mennonite community, principally in the western department of Boqueron.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

The constitution recognizes the historical role of the Catholic Church in public life, and Catholic priests often performed 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. The Government also observed the death of Pope John Paul II as a public holiday on the day of his funeral.

All religious groups must be registered with the Ministry of the Interior. The criteria for recognition consist of completing required paperwork, being certified as a nonprofit organization, passing financial and criminal background checks, and paying a small fee. The Government enforced few controls on religious groups, and there were many unregistered churches. The latter were typically small, Christian evangelical churches with few members.

The Government is secular. Most government officials were 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 were 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

In January and early February 2006 in several locations around the city of Asuncion, there were reports of approximately seventy incidents of graffiti conveying messages or depicting symbols commonly associated with anti-Semitism and pro-Nazism. However, some of these incidents were patently against the United States or former dictator Alfredo Stroessner, insinuating the groups were fascists. Some of the graffiti was spray-painted on the private property of a well-known radio commentator of Jewish descent and at the home of the Jewish son-in-law of an ABC Color newspaper executive. The Government investigated the incidents, but police made no arrests 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 its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. ambassador and embassy officials met regularly with representatives of different religious groups. Representatives of the embassy raised concerns with the Government over the graffiti incidents.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 496,225 square miles and a population of approximately 27.2 million. Among the major religious communities were the Roman Catholic, various Protestant denominations (including Baptists, Anglican, Assembly of God, and many others), Seventh-day Adventist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, Baha'i Faith, Hare Krishna, and Islam. There also were indigenous communities practicing various forms of pre-Columbian and syncretistic (blending Christian and pre-Columbian) beliefs, as well as a unique and well-organized local faith, the Israelites of the New Universal Pact, which is not connected to Israel or the Jewish faith. The 2006 Continuous National Census performed by the National Statistics Institute (INEI) found that 85 percent of the population that identified with a religion was Catholic, 11 percent was evangelical, and the remaining 4 percent included Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Israelites of the New Universal Pact. Based on 1993 census data, INEI estimated that adherents of non-Christian faiths accounted for approximately 2.5 percent of the population, while agnostics and atheists constituted 1.4 percent. The Catholic nongovernmental organization (NGO) Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS) estimated that only 15 percent of Catholics regularly attended weekly church services.

The memberships of most religious groups remained at fairly constant levels; however, various evangelical Christian denominations had rapidly increasing congregations. According to some estimates, in the last twenty years their representation grew from 2 to 3 percent of the population to 10 to 15 percent.

The National Evangelical Council (CONEP) estimated that evangelicals represented at least 15 percent of the population. Historically, evangelicals resided in areas outside of Lima, the capital, and in rural rather than urban areas; however, in the last fifteen years, their numbers in urban areas increased significantly. There were small Jewish populations in Lima and Cuzco and small Muslim populations in Lima (mostly of Palestinian origin) and Tacna (predominantly of Pakistani origin).

Some Catholics combined indigenous worship with Catholic traditions. This type of syncretistic religion was practiced most often in the Andean mountain highlands. Indigenous peoples in the remote eastern jungles also practiced traditional faiths. The founder of the Israelites of the New Universal Pact organized the group in 1960 in Junin Department; most adherents were concentrated in and near Lima.

Foreign missionary groups, including Mormons and several evangelical organizations, operated freely throughout the country, although they did not receive the same treatment in the areas of customs, immigration, and taxation given to the Catholic Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 a concordat signed with the Vatican in 1980 grants the Catholic Church special status. Non-Catholic critics complain that the concordat was executed between the Vatican and the last military government and thus does not reflect the current democratic vision of equality. Officials of the Church sometimes play a high profile role in the public sector.

The constitution specifically prohibits discrimination based on religion; however, preferential treatment is given to the Catholic Church in education, tax benefits, immigration of religious workers, and other areas in accordance with the concordat. All work-related earnings of Catholic priests and bishops are exempt from income taxes. Real estate, buildings, and houses owned by the Catholic Church are exempt from property taxes; other religious groups (depending on the municipal jurisdiction)

must pay property taxes for schools and clergy residences. Some Catholic clergy receive state remuneration in addition to the stipends paid to them by the Catholic Church. This applies to the country's fifty-two bishops as well as priests whose ministries are located in towns and villages along the country's borders. In addition, each diocese receives a monthly institutional subsidy from the Government. According to Catholic Church officials, none of these payments are substantial.

The executive branch formally interacts with religious communities on issues of religious freedom through the Ministry of Justice. The ministry issues resolutions that implement laws, and interacts with the public through an office of relations with the Catholic Church and an office for non-Catholic religions. Both offices, constituting a Religious Affairs Unit, maintain a continuing dialogue with the Catholic Church and other organized religious groups on concerns of religious freedom. The primary functions of the Religious Affairs Unit are to process complaints of religious discrimination and to assist religious groups in relations with the state, such as seeking exemptions from import taxes and customs duties.

In 2004 the Ministry of Justice promulgated a regulation designed to enhance religious freedom and equality by registering churches and assisting them in receiving state benefits similar to the Catholic Church; however, this registration process has provoked controversy. Before 2006 some evangelical Christian churches complained that the Government made it difficult for them to register because new, independent churches continued to be founded, while government regulations require that a church be operating for several years before it can register. In addition, because many evangelical churches do not have central lines of authority and lack sufficient doctrinal similarities for the Government to group them together, evangelical organizations complained that the registration process required each individual evangelical church to register as a separate religion. Other groups, which were more hierarchical and established, supported strict registration requirements as a deterrent to fraudulent or misleading registrations.

In 2005 the Ministry of Justice convened an interfaith workgroup of representatives from the religious faiths to discuss the reform of laws that infringe upon the rights of religious communities and to strengthen relations between the state and non-Catholic religions. The Ministry of Justice and the religious groups together clarified the registration policies. The regulations permit the major evangelical umbrella organizations, CONEP, and the Union of Evangelical Christian Churches of Peru to register their member churches as one group. The registration is not intended to recognize churches officially but to identify which should receive administrative assistance from the Religious Affairs Unit in relations with the state (for example, tax-free donations). By the end of 2005 the interfaith workgroup developed a draft law to promote further religious freedom and equality. The Ministry of Justice sent this legislation to Congress for its consideration. Independently, 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 actions on these draft laws.

All religious groups are free to establish places of worship, train clergy, and proselytize. During the period covered by this report, the unit did not receive any discrimination complaints.

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 has made it mandatory for public school authorities to appoint religious education teachers upon individual recommendations and approval by the presiding Catholic bishop of the area.

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 by the school for religious education; however, they must supply their own 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 the preferential treatment accorded to the Catholic Church, claimed that the financial subsidies and tax benefits given to the Church were far more widespread and lucrative than publicly acknowledged. Some

groups complained that Catholic bishops, for example, received government expense allowances for which the bishops do not have to account. Ministry of Justice officials stated the highest payment was for bishops at $300 (990 soles) per month, while other Catholic Church officials received a fraction of that amount.

Catholic charities do not have to pay customs duties; however, non-Catholics with extensive charitable activities complained that donations of goods from abroad are taxed at commercial rates. Ongoing registration reform and Ministry of Justice assistance is designed to facilitate duty-free import of charitable goods.

In 2004 and 2005 some evangelical missionaries cited immigration discrimination as impinging on religious freedom. Residency documents show an immigrating Catholic priest to be in a "Religious—Catholic" category, but there is no category for non-Catholic religious officials. As a result, clergy or missionaries from non-Catholic faiths may go through a lengthy immigration process from which Catholics are exempt, including a requirement to leave the country every six months and reapply for a visa. According to evangelical leaders and the Justice Ministry, the immigration problems have become less common thanks to flexibility from the immigration agency on the need for missionaries to represent religions registered with the Ministry of Justice. There were no reports that non-Catholic clergy were denied admission because of their religious status. At the end of the period covered by this report, religious groups and the Ministry of Justice were working to add a category for "Non-Catholic Religious Worker" to immigration regulations.

Non-Catholic organizations complained that although their adherents may be exempted from attending Catholic instruction, the students who do so lose academic credits. Students who graduate from primary and secondary schools without these credits cannot be at the top of their class regardless of other academic achievements they attain. These students are then disadvantaged in competitions for scholarships or for admission to universities with competitive entry requirements.

By law the military may employ only Catholic clergy as chaplains, and Catholicism is the only recognized religion of military personnel. A 1999 government decree creating forty Catholic military chaplaincies obliges members of the armed forces and the police, as well as their civilian coworkers and relatives, to participate in such services. There have been no reports of discrimination or denials of promotion for non-Catholic members of the military, nor have there been any reports of personnel refusing to participate in Catholic services. However, as the number of non-Catholic Christians increases in the military, reflecting the increase in the number of evangelical Protestants nationwide, non-Catholic soldiers segregated in barracks have found it difficult to attend religious services when no chaplains or chaplains' assistants exist for them.

Some non-Catholic missionary groups claimed that the law discriminated against them by taxing religious materials, including Bibles that they bring into the country, while the Catholic Church was not taxed on such items.

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

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

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 used evangelical church staff in rural areas to minister to its congregations when there was no priest available. The Catholic Church (through the CEAS) and CONEP (through its loosely affiliated Peace and Hope Evangelical Association) have conducted joint national campaigns on behalf of prison inmates and detainees wrongly charged or sentenced for terrorism and treason.

The fringe political movement Ethnocacerism published a bimonthly newspaper which included anti-Semitic statements as well as accounts that minimized the Holocaust and promoted admiration for Adolf Hitler's strong "nationalist" leadership. The paper received increased attention because it was named Ollanta after Ollanta Humala, who subsequently declared his candidacy for the presidency. In late 2005 publishers changed the paper's name to Antauro after Ollanta Humala distanced himself from his brother, Antauro, the newspaper's editor and one of its main contributors.

SECTION IV. U.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 to maintain regular contact with religious organizations involved in the protection of human rights, including the CEAS, the Interreligious Committee of Peru, the Peace and Hope Evangelical Association, and the Freedom of Conscience Institute.

SAINT KITTS AND NEVIS

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 104 square miles and a population of approximately 46,000. Christianity was the dominant religion. An estimated 50 percent of the population adhered to Anglican beliefs, and 25 percent were Roman Catholic. Methodist, Moravian, Seventh-day Adventist, and Jehovah's Witnesses denominations were also present. Evangelical Christian denominations have been gaining followers. There was a small Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) community. Minority religious groups included Rastafarians and members of the Baha'i Faith. There was 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. However, 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

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

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 eleven churches in the evangelical community and promoted their interests.

Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 238 square miles and a population estimated at 163,000. Christianity was the dominant religion. Roman Catholics accounted for approximately 67 percent of the population, and the Catholic Church described 40 percent of these members as "active." The second largest group was evangelical Christians, including Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Anglican Church had approximately 6,000 members, with 50 percent being active, while Baptists and Methodists represented smaller numbers.

The total number of non-Christians was very small. There were an estimated 350 Muslims, primarily local converts, but some were also immigrants from the Middle East, South Asia, and other Caribbean countries. Muslims worshipped in two musallahs (informal places of worship); there were no mosques in the country. Other minority religious groups included Rastafarians 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 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 Roman Catholic Church and mainline Protestant denominations.

Christian holy days, including Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

The Government requires a list of at least one hundred members to register a religious group. Official recognition allows a religious organization to have duty-free import privileges and the right to register births, deaths, and marriages within the community. Any citizen can register life events with the Government; however, registration of a religious group allows its officials to act in this capacity as well. Muslim leaders have applied for official recognition; their application was pending at the end of the period covered by this report because the Government was in the process of revising registration procedures. A number of other religious groups were awaiting registration as well.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom, although some tension existed between the historically dominant Catholic Church and the rapidly growing evangelical denominations. Some evangelicals allegedly criticized Catholics and mainline Protestants for adherence to "slave religions" and for not accepting a literal interpretation of the Bible. Muslim leaders claimed that some recent converts to Islam hid their new religion from non-Muslim friends and family to avoid criticism and discrimination. The St. Lucia Christian Council conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian community.

In April 2006 a man was remanded to custody, accused of attempting to assassinate the Eastern Caribbean's Catholic archbishop. The accused was to be sent for psychological evaluation before being formally charged. Government officials denounced the attack as reprehensible and called for tolerance among religious groups. At the end of the reporting period, no further developments had taken place.

Two Rastafarian men, found guilty in 2003 of murder and arson in a 2000 attack on the Catholic cathedral in Castries and sentenced to hang, remained in prison awaiting execution.

Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

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

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 150 square miles and a population of 117,000. Christianity was the dominant religion. The Anglican Church consisted of approximately 24,000 members, with one-third described as active. Approximately 11,000 citizens were Roman Catholic, with a majority of them being active. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also claimed 11,000 members and described 50 percent as active. The Methodist Church had 4,500 active members registered with congregations, although more claimed affiliation in the previous census. There were twenty to thirty different Pentecostal denominations in the country, with the largest, the Pentecostal Assembly of the West Indies, claiming approximately twenty congregations. There was a small Salvation Army presence estimated at seventy members. The number of non-Christians was small; the Baha'i Faith had approximately 1,500 adherents, and there was a smaller number of Rastafarians.

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 comprised of the Anglican, Roman 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, 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

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

The Christian Council of Churches conducted activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian religious groups, although no evangelical church has joined.

Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools. Tension continued to exist among some Christian denominations, with evangelical Christians allegedly criticizing Catholics and mainstream Protestants for adhering to "slave religions." Baha'i representatives noted that some followers hid their religious affiliation to avoid criticism and 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. embassy also discusses religious freedom with local groups and other organizations.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 63,037 square miles and a population of approximately 493,000. According to the 2004 census, an estimated 27 percent of the inhabitants traced their ancestry to the Indian subcontinent, another 18 percent identified themselves as Creoles of African descent, 15 percent claimed Indonesian ancestry, and 15 percent were of maroon descent, or descendants of escaped slaves. Smaller percentages of the population claimed Chinese, Amerindian, Portuguese, Lebanese, or Dutch descent.

According to recent census data, 40.7 percent of the population was Christian, including Roman Catholics and other Protestant groups—among them Moravians, Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, evangelical, Baptist, and Methodist; 20 percent was Hindu, 13.5 percent was Muslim, 3.3 percent followed indigenous religions, 15 percent

claimed to not know their religion, 4.4 percent claimed no faith, and 2.5 percent declared other, unspecified faiths. Indigenous religions were practiced by the Amerindians and the Afro-descendant maroon populations. The Amerindians, concentrated principally in the interior and to a lesser extent in coastal areas, practiced shamanism, a worship of all living things, through a medicine man, or piaiman. Maroons, who inhabited the interior, worshipped nature through a practice that had no special name, and they also worshipped their ancestors through a rite called wintie. Citizens of Amerindian and maroon origin who classified themselves as Christian often simultaneously followed indigenous religious customs, which was known to and accepted by their Christian church leaders.

The Jewish community numbered 150, and there were small numbers of Baha'is and Buddhists. There were also other groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the World Islamic Call Society.

Several Christian denominations, including Canadian and U.S.-based church groups, operated missionary programs throughout the country. There were an estimated twenty U.S. missionaries; approximately 90 percent were affiliated with the Baptist or Wesleyan Methodist churches.

Many political parties had strong ethnic ties, and members tended to adhere to or practice one faith. Six of the eight governing coalition parties were ethnically based. For example, within the governing coalition, the majority of members of the mostly Creole National Party of Suriname were Moravian, members of the mostly ethnic Indian United Reformed Party were Hindu, and those of the mostly ethnic Javanese Pertjaja Luhur Party tended to be Muslim. However, parties had no requirement that political party leaders or members adhere to a particular religion.

There was no direct correlation between religious affiliation and socioeconomic status; however, those who practiced indigenous religions in the small villages of the interior generally had a lower socioeconomic status. With the exception of those following indigenous practices, religious communities were not concentrated in any particular region of the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally 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 five holy days that are celebrated as official holidays: Holi Phagwa (Hindu), Good Friday (Christian), Easter Monday (Christian), Eid al-Fitr (Muslim), and Christmas (Christian). Citizens of all faiths 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.

Aside from the standard requirement for an entry visa, foreign missionaries face no special restrictions.

The armed forces maintain a chaplaincy with Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic clergy available to military personnel of all faiths. While the chaplaincy provides interfaith services, personnel are also welcome to attend outside religious services.

The government education system provides limited subsidies to a number of public elementary and secondary schools established and managed by various religious organizations. While the teachers are civil servants and the schools are public, religious groups provide all funding with the exception of teachers' salaries and a small maintenance stipend. Religious instruction in public schools is permitted but not required for all students. Schools offer religious instruction in a variety of faiths.

Parents are not permitted to home school 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 faith, including wearing headscarves, crosses, or yarmulkes.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees 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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. Most citizens, particularly those living in the capital of Paramaribo, celebrated to varying degrees the religious holidays of other groups.

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.

SECTION IV. U.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.

Following the 2006 controversy and subsequent violence surrounding a Danish cartoon depicting 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. In February 2006 the embassy delivered equipment worth approximately $30,000 (84,000 Surinamese dollars) to support a project to preserve Moravian church archives.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,980 square miles and a population of approximately 1.3 million. Approximately 40 percent of the population was of African descent and 40 percent of East Indian descent. The balance was mostly of European, Syrian, Lebanese, or Chinese descent.

According to the latest official statistics (2000), 26 percent of the population was 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 subscribed to traditional Caribbean religions with African roots, such as the Spiritual Baptists (sometimes called Shouter Baptists), 5.4 percent; and the Orisha, 0.1 percent. The smaller groups were Jehovah's Witnesses (1.6 percent), atheists (1.9 percent), or those listed as "other," which included numerous small Christian groups as well as Baha'is, Rastafarians, Buddhists, and Jews (10.7 percent), or undeclared (1.4 percent).

Afro-Trinidadians were predominantly Christian, with a small Muslim community, and were concentrated in and around Port-of-Spain and the east-west corridor of Trinidad. The population of Trinidad's sister island, Tobago, was overwhelmingly of African descent and predominantly Christian. Indo-Trinidadians were primarily concentrated in central and southern Trinidad and were principally divided between the Hindu and Muslim faiths, along with significant Presbyterian and some Catholic representation.

Ethnic and religious divisions were reflected in political life, with most Afro-Trinidadians voting for the governing People's National Movement party, and most Indo-Trinidadians supporting the opposition United National Congress (UNC) party. Religious overtones were sometimes present in the messages and ceremonies of these political parties, particularly those of the UNC, which occasionally incorporated Hindu references and cultural expressions into their public events.

Foreign missionaries present included members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Baptists, Mennonites, and Muslims. The Mormons maintained approximately thirty foreign missionaries, while other denominations averaged between five and ten foreign missionaries in 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. 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 in its faith. Attendance at these classes is voluntary, and the faiths represented are diverse. Parents may enroll their children in private schools for religious reasons. Home schooling is not allowed, since the Education Act mandates formal schooling for all children, whether in public or private schools.

During the second half of 2005, the Ministry of Social Development became responsible for ecclesiastical affairs. The ministry administers annual financial grants to religious organizations and issues recommendations on land use by such organizations.

The law prohibits acts that would offend or insult another person or group on the grounds of race, origin, or religion or which would incite racial or religious hatred, and it provides for prosecution for the desecration of any place of worship. Government officials routinely speak out against religious intolerance and generally do not publicly favor any religion. The process of judicial review is available to those who claim to be victims of religious discrimination.

The Government has set aside public holidays for every religious group with large followings. The Christian holidays are Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas; the Hindu holiday is Divali; and the Muslim holiday is Eid al-Fitr. In addition, the Government recognizes the Spiritual Baptist Liberation 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 promoted 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 faith 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 in the country; however, the Government limited the number of foreign missionaries allowed to be in the country to thirty per religious denomination at any given time. Missionaries must meet standard requirements for an entry visa, must represent a registered religious group, and may not remain in the country for more than three years at a time. They may reenter the country after at least one year of absence.

Members of the military force were predominantly Afro-Trinidadian and Christian, and the military maintained a part-time chaplain to provide Christian religious services. Military personnel also had access to other religious services in their local communities.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 faiths with significant followings in the country, 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. The Mormons joined the IRO during the period covered by this report.

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

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 68,039 square miles and a population estimated at 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 mainline Protestant minority was composed primarily of Anglicans, Methodists, Lutherans, and Baptists. Other denominations and branches included 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 were approximately 25,000 Jews. According to local Jewish leaders, since 2002 the number of Jews has declined due to emigration. An April 2006 newspaper report indicated that approximately 850 families practiced Buddhism. The Unification Church was active in the country and had major property holdings, including a daily newspaper. There was a Muslim population that lived primarily near the border with Brazil. An Islamic cultural representative estimated approximately 300 to 400 Muslims in the country but noted that the majority were minimally observant. The estimated 4,000 Baha'is were concentrated primarily in Montevideo.

Many Christian groups performed foreign missionary work. Groups reported no difficulties obtaining visas for religious work. Statistics indicated that there were an estimated 780 Mormon missionaries from neighboring countries and the United States 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 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 five years. Once the ministry grants religious status, the church can request an exemption each year from the taxing body, which is usually the municipal government.

The religious holy days of Three Kings Day, Carnival (the Monday and Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday), Holy Thursday, Good Friday, All Souls' Day, and Christmas are celebrated as official national holidays 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 Friday. A Muslim representative stated that employers generally respected this practice.

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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. 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 representatives of the Catholic Church, the Jewish community, the Islamic community, the Mormon Church, and Protestant groups.

VENEZUELA

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, 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. During the period covered by this report, the Government ordered the departure of a U.S. evangelical group from indigenous areas.

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

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

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 352,144 square miles and a population of approximately twenty-seven million. According to government estimates, 70 percent of the population was Roman Catholic, 29 percent was Protestant (usually defined as all non-Roman Catholic Christians), and the remaining 1 percent practiced other religions or was atheist. The Venezuelan Evangelical Council estimated that evangelical Protestants constituted approximately 10 percent of the population. A variety of foreign missionary groups operated in the country, including Catholics, evangelicals, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

There were small but influential Jewish and Muslim communities. The Jewish community numbered approximately 15,000 and was most active in the capital, Caracas. The Muslim community was concentrated among citizens 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. However, in contrast with the previous report, 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 because their assigned shares are fixed. While the Government continued to provide funding to Catholic-operated schools as usual, there were significant cutbacks to funding given directly to the Episcopal Conference of Venezuela (CEV). There were reports that funding increased to certain evangelical groups, although much of this was related to social projects implemented via the Government's social programs, and the specific amounts were not available.

Foreign missionaries require special visas to operate in the country. The Government estimated that there were approximately 3,000 such missionaries in 2005. Missionaries generally complained of increased refusal rates for first-time religious visas as well as for renewals. Missionary groups also generally complained that the religious visa process had become more difficult and prone to delays. After a temporary freeze in all religious visa applications, the Government returned to issuing visas, although reportedly at a slower pace than before.

In October 2005 the Mormons withdrew 219 U.S. missionaries, citing difficulties in receiving religious visas. The growing crime rate was also a factor, especially considering that the young missionaries worked in poor, high-crime neighborhoods.

The Government continued to provide annual subsidies to Catholic schools and social programs that help the poor. Other religious groups are free to establish and operate 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.

In October 2005 President Chavez accused missionaries from the U.S.-based religious group New Tribes Mission (NTM) of contaminating the cultures of indigenous populations as well as carrying out illicit activities with the group's small aircraft. The Ministry of Interior subsequently rescinded the group's permission, granted in 1953, to conduct its social programs among indigenous tribes. The NTM appealed the order to the Supreme Court, which denied an injunction but admitted the case, which remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. More than 100 NTM missionaries withdrew from the indigenous areas in compliance with the Government's order, abandoning properties held for decades. The Government re-

portedly seized some of these properties, without compensation, for its own social programs. Other foreign missionary groups working in the indigenous areas departed voluntarily after government officials warned that all such missionary activity would be stopped. Despite being duly registered religious and civil society groups, at the end of the period covered by this report foreign missionary groups were prohibited from entering indigenous areas.

In April 2006 the Government's telecommunication regulator reassigned the frequencies that had been used since 1999 by a Catholic-operated station, Vale TV. The Government contended that the frequency was needed for other purposes and had reportedly offered the Church a different frequency. Church officials said in May 2006 they hoped to reach a compromise with the Government; however, at the end of the period covered by this report no compromise had been achieved, and the station continued to broadcast.

Public confrontation between Catholic bishops and government officials continued. In April 2006 a Catholic priest working for the CEV was kidnapped and killed in Caracas under unclear circumstances. The Catholic Church clashed with government officials after the attorney general engaged in repeated public commentary on the case, blaming the priest for being partly responsible for his own death. Both sides accused the other of using the case for political gain. As of May 2006 the Government had formally charged one person for the crime but had not resolved several open questions surrounding the investigation.

In July and August 2005, government officials traded attacks with retired Catholic Cardinal Castillo Lara over human rights and press freedom problems. The CEV also issued its annual statement in January 2006 criticizing the Government for not addressing persistent poverty. President Hugo Chavez publicly attacked the bishops and challenged their conclusions. Church officials again criticized the Government in March 2006 for the deteriorating security conditions and rampant crime, exacerbated by the kidnapping and killing of three Catholic school students and their driver with alleged participation by Caracas police.

In February 2006 there was a report that an educational video used by the Government's high school education "mission" depicted NTM missionaries and other groups operating in the indigenous areas as promulgating a doctrine of "terror," "fanatical preaching," and "espionage." The video was used in a program that reportedly serves two million youths. Religious groups raised their complaints to the Government, which reportedly agreed to discontinue use of the video.

The military chaplain corps was comprised 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. In October 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-Semitic Acts

The president, the Government, and their supporters occasionally made comments that were either clearly anti-Semitic or could have been construed as anti-Semitic. In December 2005 speech, President Chavez referred to "descendants of those who crucified Christ and threw founding father Simon Bolivar out of Venezuela." Although an international Jewish group criticized Chavez' remarks as anti-Semitic, local Jewish groups accepted the president's subsequent explanation that he was not making an intentionally anti-Semitic remark. Jewish leaders later met with the president and senior government officials to discuss concerns about anti-Semitism among government sympathizers. These included frequent anti-Semitic remarks on opinion shows broadcast on the official television station and radio as well as in a progovernment national daily newspaper. Jewish leaders also expressed concern over the Government's growing relations with Iran, whose president called repeatedly for the termination of the country of Israel.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ABUSES AND DISCRIMINATION

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

During the period covered by this report there were reports that citizens harassed Mormon missionaries in poor areas. The verbal and physical harassment appeared motivated by the Government's accusations against the NTM missionaries.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. However, the Government's frequent refusal to meet with U.S. embassy officials generally impeded bilateral communication on this and other topics.

The embassy maintained close contact with various religious communities. The U.S. ambassador met regularly with religious authorities and sought to raise their concerns with appropriate government officials when appropriate and when government officials agreed to meet with embassy representatives.

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 rel-

evant 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 of Major Developments

Since the first report on International Religious Freedom was issued in September 1999, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has worked continuously with the Office of International Religious Freedom, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, in implementing H.R. 2431 (the International Religious Freedom Act). The result of this cooperation has been the integration of religious freedom issues into the regular curriculum at FSI. During the period covered by this report, members of the FSI training staff took part in conferences dealing with religious freedom, persecution, conflict, and reconciliation hosted by academic institutions, think tanks, and nongovernmental organizations. The Political Training Division at FSI has continued to work with the staff of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to ensure that their insights are reflected in FSI's course offerings.

II. Courses Offered

The School of Professional and Area Studies (SPAS) at FSI offers training relevant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA) in a variety of courses. The following are brief descriptions of courses offered by the divisions of Political Training, Orientation, Consular Training, and Area Studies.

FOREIGN SERVICE OFFICER ORIENTATION (A–100)

During the A–100 Course, a senior State Department official from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) presents a session on international religious freedom. Additionally, students are provided key background materials on religious freedom on a CD Rom distributed to each officer. They are also directed to key websites containing related materials.

POLITICAL/ECONOMIC TRADECRAFT (PG–140)

This is a 3-week-long course. The students have been assigned for the first time to work in an embassy's or consulate's political, economic, or combined political/economic section overseas. Political/Economic Tradecraft is essentially a required course, in that State Department officers are assigned to take it by the personnel system and exceptions are rare. The State Department expects that a large proportion of these officers/students during their careers will be directly responsible for preparing their post's human rights and religious freedom reports.

As part of required consultations during the course, each student is asked to obtain the Annual Report on Religious Freedom and the report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom listed in Section III. In addition the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor provides a session during which religious freedom issues are featured prominently.

GLOBAL ISSUES (PP–510)

This 3-day course is given twice a year and is geared toward mid-level foreign affairs and national security professionals working for the Department of State and other agencies. In the fall, this course is combined with a separate module on human rights.

As in the Tradecraft courses, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor provides presentations during which religious freedom issues are featured together with other aspects of U.S. human rights policy.

INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT WORKSHOP (PP–519)

This 4-day workshop focuses on various aspects of international conflict, especially the enhancement of skills needed to analyze the causes of conflict and develop a plan for preventive diplomacy. This course trains up to 30 foreign affairs and national security professionals at all levels working for the Department of State and other agencies.

Multiple segments in this course address the factors that drive ethnic conflict, which include questions of religious identity and religious and ethnic persecution.

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-plays and other scenarios involving religious minorities have been incorporated into the American Citizen Services portion of the course.

AREA STUDIES

The Foreign Service Institute and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation annually sponsor a major symposium focused on religious freedom and the role of U.S. diplomats overseas. Officers in FSI language training and area studies courses take part in this symposium. The symposium brings together leading experts on religious issues and foreign affairs practitioners who can speak to the job related aspects of religious freedom issues to provide our officers with a clear understanding of the importance of these issues and the challenges and responsibilities they will face.

Throughout the year, the course chairs in the Area Studies Division, in cooperation with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, ensure that their courses address both regional and country specific issues of religion, religious freedom, and human rights. Participants receive substantial information encompassing the full range of issues affecting particular regions, including religious freedom and human rights, religious history and religious traditions. Students also receive reading lists (and internet guidance) that direct them to even more detailed material.

AMBASSADORIAL TRAINING

The Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs regularly speaks to the Ambassadorial Seminar on the importance of this topic.

III. Background Material on Religious Freedom

The following background materials related to religious freedom are made available (as hard copy or through website address) to FSI students:

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

BACKGROUND MATERIALS PROVIDED TO STUDENTS AT FSI

- Mission Statement for the State Department Office of International Religious Freedom
- "Preparing the Annual Report on Religious Freedom for 2006"
- 2005 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom (Executive Summary)
- Main Web Page of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
  - List of current Members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
  - Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

Highlights from Key International Documents:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 18)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Articles 18, 26 & 27)

LINKS TO INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BACKGROUND MATERIALS

1. 2005 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom (Executive Summary): *http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35335.html*

2. Main Web Page of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent, congressionally funded commission: *http://www.uscirf.gov*

- List of Members (current) for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom: *http://www.uscirf.gov/about/commissioners.html*
- Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom May 2006. *http://www.uscirf.gov/countries/publications/currentreport/2006annualRpt.pdf#page=1*

3. Universal Declaration of Human Rights *http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html*

4. International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights *http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a—ccpr.html*

APPENDIX D

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS) AND THE INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ACT (IRFA)

The Department of Homeland Security has assumed responsibilities formerly charged to the Immigration and Naturalization Service under the IRFA. The DHS is committed to ensuring that all claims for refugee and asylum protection are treated with fairness, respect, and dignity and that all mandates of IRFA for these programs are properly implemented. This appendix summarizes the Department's actions during the Fiscal Year 2005, as required under Section 102 (b)(1)(E) of IRFA.

I. Training of Asylum Officers and Refugee Adjudicators

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) provides extensive training to Asylum Officers to prepare them to perform their duties of adjudicating asylum claims. The training covers all grounds on which an asylum claim may be based, including religion. Asylum Officers receive approximately five weeks of specialized training related to international human rights law, non-adversarial interview techniques, and other relevant national and international refugee laws and principles.[1] During the five-week course and in local asylum office training, USCIS provides Asylum Officers with specialized training on religious persecution issues. With the passage of IRFA in 1998, the five-week training program expanded to incorporate information about IRFA as a part of the regular curriculum. In addition, a continual effort is made to include further discussion of religious persecution whenever possible in both the five-week course and in local asylum office training. The Asylum Division regularly updates its training materials and conducts training in local asylum offices to reflect any recently issued papers on religious persecution from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, or other organizations as well as any recent developments in case law or country conditions on this issue.

USCIS developed specialized training for refugee officers, the Refugee Application Adjudication Course (RAAC) as mandated by IRFA. When initially developed, the course consisted of two-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) and new modules were developed specifically for overseas refugee processing.

More recently, with the creation of the Refugee Corps and hiring of full-time Headquarters staff dedicated to refugee adjudications in the fall of 2005, the refugee training was expanded to three weeks and the content was augmented. 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 Asylum Officer Basic Training Course. This three-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, non-adversarial interview techniques, and other relevant national and international refugee laws and principles. During the train-

[1] Asylum Officers are required to complete two five-week training courses, the Adjudication and Asylum Officer Basic Training Course (AAOBTC), and the Asylum Officer Basic Training Course (AOBTC). The AAOBTC covers the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and basic immigration law. The AOBTC includes international human rights law, asylum and refugee law, interviewing techniques, decision-making and decision-writing skills, effective country conditions research skills, and computer skills. In addition compulsory in-service training for all asylum officers is held weekly.

ing, students receive specialized instruction on religious persecution issues. For example, as part of the last two sessions, members of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (UCIRF) conducted 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 (UNHCR) 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 and/or production and distribution of materials regarding human rights conditions around the world. The RIC has published an online guide to web research that is posted on the internal DHS website. This online internet guide includes links to government and non-government websites that contain information on religious persecution, as well as other issues relevant to asylum adjudications. The RIC separately catalogues 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.

Starting in 2002, USCIS included specific anti-bias 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 nearly 13 million persons. 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 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, as well as 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. Over the past decade, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has been adjusting its focus away from the large refugee admissions programs that had developed during the Cold War for nationals of Communist countries and toward more diverse refugee groups that require protection for a variety of reasons, including religious belief. The following describes the program's efforts, by region, in meeting the needs of refugees worldwide who have faced religious persecution.

The U.S. admissions program processes refugee cases referred by UNHCR, U.S. embassies, and certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose claims are based on persecution due to religious beliefs (in addition to race, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion). It has worked closely with UNHCR and NGOs to strengthen this referral process.

Africa

For the majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa, religious freedom and peaceful coexistence are the rule, even where other conflicts hold sway or where there has been communal violence along sectarian lines as in Nigeria. The primary exceptions to the rule have been Sudan and periodic harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses—e.g., in Eritrea. During the 22-year civil war between "north" and "south," the government conducted or tolerated attacks on civilians, indiscriminate bombing raids, and slave raids in the south, all with a religious as well as an ethnic dimension. Though the conflict in Darfur has featured its own human rights abuses based on ethnic differences, it lacks the religious dimensions of the North-South conflict. In Northern Sudan, Islam is treated as the state religion and a Muslim majority runs the government. In areas controlled by the government, access to education, as well as other social services, is far easier to obtain for Muslims than for non-Muslims. The government has restricted the activities of Christians, practitioners of traditional indigenous religions, and other non-Muslim religions. However, under the January 9, 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the North-South conflict, a new constitution was drafted to include specific religious freedom

guarantees based on a series of negotiated protocols. The interim National Constitution entered into force on July 9, 2005, and a new Government of National Unity took office in September of that year. 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 FY 2005, 2,205 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 for approximately 550,000 Sudanese refugees. However, UNHCR continues to refer a limited number of Sudanese refugees in need of protection for consideration by the U.S refugee admissions program.

East Asia

While many governments in East Asia permit freedom of worship, religious believers face serious persecution in some countries. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) severely restricts religious freedom, including organized religious activity, except that which is supervised tightly by officially recognized groups linked to the government. While the DPRK Constitution provides for "freedom of religious belief," genuine religious freedom does not exist. 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 situation in other countries such as China, Vietnam, Burma, and Laos is mixed. The Chinese constitution provides for freedom of worship; however, it restricts activities of religious organizations. In China, most independent religious activities are either prohibited or severely restricted. Despite dramatic increases in religious observance in China, the government continues to suppress, intimidate, harass, detain and imprison followers of those religions or spiritual movements it cannot directly control, most notably the (underground) Catholic Church loyal to the Vatican, Protestant "house churches," some Muslim groups, Buddhists loyal to the Dalai Lama, and the Falun Gong spiritual movement. In Vietnam, the constitution provides for freedom of worship; however, it also restricts activities of religious organizations. There were a number of significant improvements in law and practice, 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 non-recognized religions continued. Some religious practitioners, especially ethnic minorities in the Northwest Highlands, continue to suffer harassment, arbitrary detention, and physical intimidation, though 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 periodic arrest and imprisonment. 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.

Former Soviet Union

The breakup of the Soviet Union initially led to a resurgence of religious practice throughout the region, but in recent years the fear of newer religious groups, many of them with ties to coreligionists in other countries, has led to a backlash in a number of the newly independent states. Most post-Soviet states regulate religious groups and activities, specifying a set of "traditional" religions with certain privileges denied to other groups. They require registration and use this as a mechanism of control; by refusing to register new denominations it makes them vulnerable to charges of illegal association. In Belarus, and to a lesser degree in Russia, some minority religious groups suffer harassment and difficulties finding places to meet. In some countries, such as Belarus, groups with international ties are sometimes accused of being security threats. In some countries, one's faith may be associated with ethnicity, patriotism, nationalism, or even with terrorism; and authorities may be suspicious of religious groups perceived as having political agendas and organizations. This is especially true in some of the Central Asian republics where support for political Islam and terrorism may be found in small segments of the population. In the case of Uzbekistan, 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

de-stabilizing and also suffer severe harassment. In the case of Turkmenistan, the government continues to monitor all forms of religious expression. Although the level of harassment continued to decrease in the last year, most religious groups continued to experience the types of government harassment similar to years past, including detention, arrest, confiscation of religious literature and materials, pressure to abandon religious beliefs, and threats of eviction and job loss. The U.S. refugee admission program provides resettlement opportunities to religious minority members (as identified in the Lautenberg Amendment) with close family ties to the United States. In addition, UNHCR has recently increased the number of referrals to the program. Refugee admissions based on grounds of religious persecution have been significant in both the Bosnia and Kosovo resettlement efforts. The Department of State will continue to work with the UNHCR, nongovernmental organizations (both faith-based and non-sectarian), human rights groups, and U.S. missions to identify persons who qualify under the 1980 act on religious grounds for whom resettlement is appropriate. 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.

Latin America/Caribbean

In general, religious freedom is widely recognized and enjoyed in Latin America. The key exception is Cuba, where the Government engages in active efforts to monitor and control religious institutions, including surveillance, infiltration, and harassment of clergy and members; evictions from and confiscation of places of worship; and preventive detention of religious activists. It also uses registration as a mechanism of control; by refusing to register new denominations, it makes them vulnerable to charges of illegal association. However, despite these obstacles to religious expression, church 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.

Near East and South Asia

Repression of religious minorities is common in some countries in the Near East and South Asia. In Pakistan, the government fails to protect the rights of religious minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith fostered religious intolerance and acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities, including Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, and Zikris. In India, the government sometimes in the recent past did not act swiftly enough to effectively counter societal attacks against religious minorities and attempts by some leaders of state and local governments to limit religious freedom. In Afghanistan, despite constitutional guarantees, years of Taliban rule and weak democratic institutions, including an unreformed judiciary, have contributed to a culture of intolerance manifested in acts of harassment and sometimes violence against reform minded Muslims and religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus and Sikhs. 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. Iranian refugees who belong to religious minorities (Baha'is, Sufis, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Christians) are able to apply directly for U.S. resettlement. In addition, the UNHCR and U.S. embassies in the region facilitate access to the admissions program for individuals of other nationalities who may qualify on religious grounds. Congress passed the Specter Amendment which adds "members of a religious minority in Iran" to the list of categories of aliens who may benefit from the reduced evidentiary standards for demonstrating a well-founded fear of persecution in refugee processing, established pursuant to the "Lautenberg Amendment" contained in Section 213 of the foreign Operations, Export Financing, and related Programs Appropriations Act, 1990 (P.L. 101–167). The Department of State will continue efforts to improve access to refugee processing through dialogue with nongovernmental organizations and human rights groups who may identify victims with valid claims based on grounds of religious persecution. The UNHCR also has addressed religious persecution issues in several regional workshops to increase the sensitivity of protection and resettlement officers to victims of religious persecution.