

EUROPE AND EURASIA

ALBANIA

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 11,100 square miles, and its population is approximately 3,069,275. It has a largely homogeneous ethnic population, consisting of Ghegs in the north and Tosks in the south. The ethnic Greek communities, the largest minority in Albania, are located in the southern part of the country. Other small minorities include the Roma, Egyptian community (an ethnic group similar to the Roma but which does not speak the Roma language), Vlachs, and Macedonians.

The majority of citizens are secular in orientation after decades of rigidly enforced atheism under the Communist regime, which ended in 1990. Despite such secularism, most citizens traditionally associate themselves with a religious group. Citizens of Muslim background make up the largest traditional religious group (estimated at 65 to 70 percent of the population) and are divided into two communities: those associated with a moderate form of Sunni Islam and those associated with the Bektashi school (a particularly liberal form of Shi'a Sufism). In 1925 after the revolution of Ataturk, the country became the world center of Bektashism, although it has not been recognized as such by the Government. Bektashis are concentrated mainly in the central and southern regions and are estimated to represent approximately one quarter of the country's Muslim population.

The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania (referred to as Orthodox) and the Roman Catholic Church are the other large denominations. An estimated 20 to 30 percent of the population belong to communities that are traditionally Albanian Orthodox, and 10 percent are associated with Roman Catholicism. The Orthodox Church became independent from Constantinople's authority in 1929 but was not recognized as autocephalous, or independent, until 1937. The Church's 1954 statute states that all its archbishops must have Albanian citizenship; however, the current archbishop is a Greek citizen whose application for Albanian citizenship has been pending for several years.

Muslims are concentrated mostly in the middle of the country and to some extent in the south, Orthodox mainly in the south, and Catholics in the north of the country; however, this division is not strict. The Greek minority, concentrated in the south, belongs to the Orthodox Church. There is no data available on active participation in formal religious services, but estimates are that 30 to 40 percent of the population practice a religion. Foreign religious representatives, including Muslim clerics, Christian and Baha'i missionaries, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and many others freely carry out religious activities.

According to updated data provided by the State Committee on Cults during the period covered by this report, there are 28 different Muslim societies and groups active in the country; some of these groups are foreign. There are 42 Christian societies representing more than 100 different organizations and 2,500 to 3,000 Christian and Baha'i missionaries. The largest foreign missionary groups are American, British, Italian, Greek, and Arab.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. According to the 1998 Constitution, there is no official religion and all religions are equal. However, the predominant religious communities (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic) function as juridical persons and enjoy a greater social recognition and 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.

Religious movements—with the exception of the four de facto recognized religions—may acquire the official status of a juridical person by registering with the Tirana District Court under the Law on Associations, which recognizes the status of a nonprofit association regardless of whether the organization has a cultural, recreational, religious, or humanitarian character. The Government does not require registration or licensing of religious groups; however, the State Committee on Cults maintains records and statistics on foreign religious organizations that contact it for assistance. No groups reported difficulties registering during the period covered by this report. All religious communities have criticized the Government for its unwillingness to grant them tax-exempt status.

The State Committee on Cults, created by executive decision and based on the Constitution, is charged with regulating the relations between the State and religious communities. The Chairman of the Committee has the status of a deputy minister. The Committee recognizes the equality of religious communities and respects their independence. The Committee works to protect freedom of religion and to promote interreligious development, cooperation, and understanding. The Committee claims that its records on religious organizations facilitate the granting of residence permits by police to foreign employees of various religious organizations; however, some foreign religious organizations have claimed that the Committee's involvement has not facilitated access to residence permits. There is no law or regulation that forces religious organizations to notify the Committee of their activities. There is no law on religious communities, although the Constitution calls for bilateral agreements between the State and religious communities. In 2002 the Committee coordinated the drafting of a model bilateral agreement for use in future negotiations with each religious community. Since then, the four de facto recognized religions (Sunni Muslim, Bektashi, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox) have submitted their own separate draft agreements to be reviewed by the Council of Ministers, but no action has been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

According to official figures, there are 14 religious schools in the country with approximately 2,600 total students. The Ministry of Education has the right to approve the curricula of religious schools to ensure their compliance with national education standards, and the State Committee on Cults oversees implementation.

Official holidays include religious holidays from all four predominant faiths.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government is secular and religion is not taught in public schools. While there is no law restricting the demonstration of religious affiliations in public schools, students have not been allowed to do so in practice. In July 2003, a female Muslim student graduating from university was prohibited from wearing her headscarf for her graduation picture. After the Office of the People's Advocate (a government institution tasked with investigating citizens' charges of human rights violations and protecting their fundamental freedoms) intervened, the student was allowed to take the photograph with the headscarf, and the case was resolved. The Ministry of Education contends that public schools in the country are secular and that the law prohibits ideological and religious indoctrination. No restriction is imposed on families regarding the way they raise their children with respect to religious practices.

In 1967 the Communist government banned all religious practices and expropriated the property of the established Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic Churches. The Government has not yet returned all the properties and religious objects under its control that were confiscated under the Communist regime. In cases in which religious buildings were returned, the Government often failed to return the land that surrounds the buildings, sometimes due to redevelopment claims by private individuals who began farming it or using it for other purposes. The Government does not have the resources to compensate churches adequately for the extensive damage many religious properties suffered; however, in 2001 it announced its intention to develop a long-term compensation plan, although that plan appears to have stalled by the end of the period covered by this report. Although it has recovered some con-

fiscated property, including one large parcel of land near Tirana's main square, the Orthodox Church has claimed delays in approvals for construction of churches and other buildings associated with the Church by the city government, and a lack of action on a number of other property claims throughout the country, as well as difficulty in recovering some religious icons for restoration and safekeeping. The Roman Catholic community also has outstanding property claims, but was able to consecrate a new cathedral in central Tirana in January 2002, on land provided by the Government as compensation for other land confiscated during the Communist era. The Muslim Community has also requested that the Government return a number of religious properties, including a large parcel of land located across from the Parliament building in the center of Tirana, on which a mosque once stood. By the end of June the Government has taken no action to address this property claim or a number of other such claims. However, some property has been returned to the Muslim Community.

Parliament and various political parties are working on a property restitution law that is expected to include provisions addressing religious properties, which may improve the overall situation for all religious communities.

The Albanian Evangelical Alliance, an association of approximately 87 Protestant churches throughout the country, claimed that it encountered administrative obstacles to accessing the media. However, Evangelical Alliance representatives state that it is not clear whether the limited access is due to the organization's small size or its religious affiliations. The growing evangelical community continues to seek official recognition and participation in the religious affairs section of the Council of Ministers.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Relations among the various religious groups are generally amicable, and tolerance is widespread. Society largely is secular. Intermarriage among members of different religions is extremely common. Religious communities take pride in the tolerance and understanding that prevails among them.

In January 2003, the General Secretary of the Islamic Community of Albania, Sali Tivari, was shot and killed at the Community's headquarters. Tivari was a central figure in the Islamic community, running the daily affairs of the administration. By the end of the period covered by this report, his murder had not been solved and the motives for his murder remained unclear.

Representatives of the country's Orthodox Church have noted that some churches and other buildings have been the targets of vandalism; however, these incidents were isolated and believed to be the result of the country's weak public order rather than due to religious intolerance.

Some Bektashi communities outside of Tirana have experienced intimidation, vandalism, and threats of violence. There are reports that members of other religious groups have attempted to prevent Bektashis from attending their teqes (holy shrines), and otherwise harassed Bektashi community members. During the period covered by this report a teqe was burned down in Bulqiza.

Bektashi leaders believe that foreign religious influences that are counter to the country's efforts to maintain religious tolerance and freedom are at the root of these incidents. Other religious leaders have expressed similar concerns about the potentially divisive role played by non-citizen religious extremists.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government has employed numerous initiatives to foster the development of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the country, and to further religious freedom and tolerance. The U.S. Embassy periodically has urged the Government to address outstanding religious property claims and to return church lands to the denominations that lost them under Communist rule. Embassy officers, including the Ambassador, meet frequently (both in formal office calls and at representational events) with the heads of the major religious communities in the country. The U.S. Embassy has been active in urging tolerance and moderation as a continued hallmark of society. In addition, the Embassy's Public Affairs Office is in the process of hiring a Cultural Affairs Assistant who will monitor and report on civic

affairs and religious education in secondary schools, including schools operated by faith-based organizations, and promote continued religious tolerance.

ANDORRA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the Constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, which receives some privileges not available to other faiths.

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 180.7 square miles, and a population of approximately 67,000. Very few official statistics are available relative to religion; however, traditionally approximately 90 percent of the population are Roman Catholic. The population consists largely of immigrants, with full citizens representing less than 37 percent of the total. The immigrants, who primarily are from Spain, Portugal, and France, also largely are Roman Catholic. It is estimated that, of the Catholic population, about half are active church attendees. Other religious groups include Muslims (who predominantly are represented among the approximately 2,000 North African immigrants and are split between two groups, one more fundamentalist); the New Apostolic Church; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons); several Protestant denominations, including the Anglican Church; the Reunification Church; and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Foreign missionaries are active and operate without restriction. For example, the Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses proselytize from door to door.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution acknowledges a special relationship with the Roman Catholic Church "in accordance with Andorran tradition" and recognizes the "full legal capacity" of the bodies of the Catholic Church, granting them legal status "in accordance with their own rules." One of the two constitutionally designated princes of the country (who serves equally as joint head of state with the President of France) is Bishop Joan Vives Sicilia of the Spanish town of La Seu d'Urgell. The Catholic religious celebration on September 8 of the "Virgen de Merixtall" is also a national holiday.

There is no law that clearly requires legal registration and approval of religions and religious worship. In 2001 the Government passed a law of associations, which is very general and does not mention specifically religious affairs. Prior to the 2001 law, each Ministry had its own registry for associations. In August 2001, the Government opened a new, consolidated register of associations to replace the existing separate registries. The registry 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 non-governmental organizations. In order to register or reregister, groups must provide the association statutes, the foundation agreement, a statement certifying the names of persons appointed to official or board positions in the organization, and a patrimony declaration that identifies the inheritance or endowment of the organization.

The authorities reportedly had expressed some concern regarding what treatment groups whose actions may be considered injurious to public health, safety, morals, or order should receive. The law does not limit any such groups, although it does contain a provision that no one may be "forced to join or remain in an association against his/her will."

In early 2003, the Muslim community requested that the Government provide a building to convert into a mosque. Authorities responded that the buildings identified by the Muslim community were either unavailable or not subject to government

disposition. The Muslim community has also approached the Catholic Bishop asking that a former church, no longer utilized as such, be converted into a mosque. According to press reports, Catholic religious authorities are not supportive of the request. There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Instruction in the tenets of the Catholic faith is available in public schools on an optional basis, outside of both regular school hours and the time frame set aside for elective school activities, such as civics or ethics. The Catholic Church provides teachers for religion classes, and the Government pays their salaries. The Cultural Islamic Center provides 43 students with Arabic lessons. The Government and the Moroccan community continue to discuss plans that would allow children to receive Arabic classes in school outside of the regular school day.

The Government has not taken any official steps to promote interfaith understanding, nor has it sponsored any programs or forums to coordinate interfaith dialog. However, it has been responsive to certain needs of the Muslim community. On occasion the Government has made public facilities available to various religious organizations for religious activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Societal attitudes between and among differing religious groups in general appear to be amicable and tolerant. For example, the Catholic Church of la Massana lends its sanctuary twice per month to the Anglican community, so that visiting Anglican clergy can conduct services for the English-speaking community. Although those who practice religions other than Roman Catholicism tend to be immigrants and otherwise not integrated fully into the local community, there appears to be little or no obstacle to their practicing their own religions.

There are no significant ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

An opinion poll published by the Institute of Andorran Studies on the "the values and traditions of the Andorran Society" indicates that 52 percent of citizens see themselves as "very religious people."

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

U.S. officials discuss religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Both the U.S. Ambassador, resident in Madrid, and the Consul General, resident in Barcelona, have met with Bishop Vives, the leader of the Catholic community.

ARMENIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law specifies some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of minority faiths, and there were some restrictions in practice. The Armenian Apostolic Church, which has formal legal status as the national church, enjoys some privileges not available to adherents of other faiths.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In March 2002, the Government abolished the State Council on Religious Affairs (CRA) by presidential decree. The Government continued to reject the application by the Jehovah's Witnesses for legal recognition as a registered religion, and members of the group reported individual acts of discrimination. Other denominations occasionally report acts of discrimination, usually by mid-level or lower level government officials.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, societal attitudes towards some minority religions are ambivalent.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 11,496 square miles, and its population is approximately 3 million.

The country is ethnically homogeneous, with approximately 95 percent of the population classified as ethnic Armenian. Approximately 90 percent of citizens nominally belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, an Eastern Christian denomination whose spiritual center is located at the cathedral and monastery of Etchmiadzin. Religious observance was discouraged strongly in the Soviet era, leading to a sharp decline in the number of active churches and priests, the closure of virtually all monasteries, and the nearly complete absence of religious education. As a result, the number of active religious practitioners is relatively low, although many former atheists now identify themselves with the national church.

For many citizens, Christian identity is an ethnic trait, with only a loose connection to religious belief. This identification was accentuated by the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988–94, during which Armenia and Azerbaijan expelled their respective Azeri Muslim and Armenian Christian minorities, creating huge refugee populations in both countries. The head of the Church, Catholicos Garegin II (alternate spelling Karekin), was elected in 1999 at Etchmiadzin with the participation of Armenian delegates from around the world.

There are comparatively small, but in many cases growing, communities of other faiths. The Government does not provide figures for religious adherents, but the congregants themselves offered the following estimates: Yezidi (a Kurdish religious/ethnic group which includes elements derived from Zoroastrianism, Islam, and animism, with approximately 30,000 to 40,000 nominal adherents); Catholic, both Roman and Mekhitarist (Armenian Uniate) (approximately 180,000 adherents); Pentecostal (approximately 25,000); Greek Orthodox (approximately 6,000); Jehovah's Witnesses (approximately 7,500); Armenian Evangelical Church (approximately 5,000); Baptist (approximately 2,000); unspecified "charismatic" Christian (approximately 3,000); Seventh-day Adventist; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons; 1,500 to 2,000); Jewish (500 to 1,000), and Baha'i (over 200). In addition, small Muslim, Hare Krishna, and pagan communities exist in the country. Yezidis are concentrated primarily in agricultural areas around Mount Aragats, northwest of Yerevan. Armenian Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christians are concentrated in the northern region, while most Jews, Mormons, and Baha'is are located in Yerevan. There is a remnant Muslim Kurdish community of a few hundred persons, many of which live in the Abovian region; a small group of Muslims of Azeri descent live primarily along the eastern or northern borders. In Yerevan there are approximately 1,000 Muslims, including Kurds, Iranians, and temporary residents from the Middle East.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses continue their missionary work fairly visibly and reported gains in membership during 2000 and 2001. Evangelical Christians and Mormons also are engaged in missionary work.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the law specifies some restrictions on the religious freedom of adherents of faiths other than the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Constitution also provides for freedom of conscience, including the right either to believe or to adhere to atheism. The 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience, amended in 1997, establishes the separation of church and state, but grants the Armenian Apostolic Church official status as the national church. A 1993 presidential decree, later superseded by the 1997 law, supplemented the 1991 law and further strengthened the position of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The 1991 law requires all religious denominations and organizations other than the Armenian Apostolic Church to register with the CRA. However, a March 2002 presidential decree abolished the CRA, which had been inactive except for registering religious groups, largely due to lack of resources. A presidential spokesman announced that an office attached to the Prime Minister would take over the Council's former functions, and a high-ranking official from the former CRA was appointed as the Prime Minister's Advisor on Religious Affairs. The function of registering religious groups was transferred to the Office of the State Registrar, with the Advisor on Religious Affairs holding a consultative role in the registration process. 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." To qualify a religious organization must have at least 200 adult members. A religious organization that has been refused registration may not pub-

lish newspapers or magazines, rent meeting places, broadcast programs on television or radio, or officially sponsor the visas of visitors. No previously registered religious group has been denied reregistration, and all existing registered denominations have been reregistered annually except the Hare Krishnas, whose membership is below the membership threshold of 200, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Government still denies registration to Jehovah's Witnesses, although there are enough members to qualify; the group was in the process of providing requested information to experts in the Government at the end of the period covered by this report. Several other religious groups are unregistered, including the Molokhany, a branch of the Russian "Old Believers," and some Yezidis. According to a government official, those two groups, which number in the hundreds, have not sought registration. According to the leadership of the Yezidi community, appeals to officials on their behalf regarding alleged societal discrimination elicited only a vague, non-committal response. By the end of the period covered by this report, the Government registered 48 religious organizations, some of which are individual congregations from within the same denomination. All previously registered denominations have been reregistered annually. The Hare Krishnas do not have enough members to qualify, as their numbers had dropped below even the previous membership threshold of 50.

There is no formally operating mosque; however, Yerevan's one surviving 18th century mosque, which was restored with Iranian funding, is open for regular Friday prayers. While its legal basis is tenuous since it is not registered as a religious facility, the Government does not create any obstacles for Muslims who wish to pray there.

The law permits religious education in state schools only by instructors appointed by the Armenian Apostolic Church. If requested by the school principal, the Armenian Apostolic Church sends priests to teach classes in religion and religious history in those schools; however, students may choose not to attend such classes. In 2002 many schools introduced the history of the Armenian Apostolic Church as part of mandatory coursework on religion, covering global religions in elementary school and the Armenian Apostolic Church in middle school. Other religious groups are not allowed to provide religious instruction in schools, although registered groups may do so in private homes to children of their members.

As a result of extended negotiations between the Government and the Armenian Apostolic Church, a memorandum was signed in 2000 that provided for the two sides to negotiate a concordat. This was scheduled to occur in time for the 1,700th anniversary celebrations in 2001 of the country's conversion to Christianity; however, disagreements in some areas precluded this and negotiations were in progress at the end of the period covered by this report. The document is expected to regulate relations between the two bodies, settle disputes over ecclesiastical properties and real estate confiscated during the Soviet period, and define the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church in such fields as education, morality, and the media.

The Government's Human Rights Commission, together with the Commission on National Minorities, continued to meet with many religious minority organizations during the period covered by this report.

Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) organized at least two nationwide seminars on religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The meetings brought together national representatives of religious groups and government representatives.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, most registered religious groups reported no serious legal impediments to their activities. However, members of faiths other than the Armenian Apostolic Church are subject to some government restrictions. In particular the 1991 law forbids "proselytizing" (undefined in the law), except by the Armenian Apostolic Church, and required all other religious denominations and organizations to register with the Government. The Government continued to deny registration to the Jehovah's Witnesses during the period covered by this report, despite their six attempts to register since 1995. The CRA previously had stated that the denial was due to the group's opposition to military service; however, in 1999 and 2000 the Council defended its refusal to accept applications by the Jehovah's Witnesses by stating that the group cannot be registered because "illegal proselytism" is allegedly integral to its activities. Discussions between Jehovah's Witnesses and the CRA were suspended in 2001 due to a lack of progress on this issue. No further discussions between Jehovah's Witnesses and the CRA regarding registration took place in 2001 and 2002 prior to the CRA's abolition. In October 2002, the newly appointed Advisor on Religious Affairs sent a compromise proposal to the Jehovah's Witnesses, suggesting changes in their administrative by-laws that

would allow for the group's registration. The Jehovah's Witnesses are considering the proposals, pending the decision of the Assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Although the law bans foreign funding for foreign-based churches, the Government has not enforced this ban and considers it unenforceable. The law also mandates that religious organizations other than the Armenian Apostolic Church need prior permission from the Government to engage in religious activities in public places, travel abroad, or invite foreign guests to the country. However, in practice travel by religious personnel is not restricted, and at the end of the period covered by this report it was not clear how the CRA's abolition would affect such travel. No action has been taken against missionaries. A 1993 presidential decree required the CRA to investigate the activities of the representatives of registered religious organizations and to ban missionaries who engage in activities contrary to their status. However, religious groups did not report any investigations of missionaries during the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

At the end of the period covered by this report, 23 members of Jehovah's Witnesses remained in prison and 7 in pretrial detention charged with draft evasion or, if forcibly drafted, with desertion due to refusal to serve. During the reporting period, eight members who had been serving terms were released to house arrest after serving one-third of their sentences. Representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses said that those imprisoned were members of their community who had been called for military service and went directly to police to turn themselves in rather than waiting until induction to declare conscientious objection. Between mid-2001 and 2002, Amnesty International reported that at least 16 conscientious objectors were released from detention after serving only part of their sentences, although they were required to report regularly to the police. Others were released under the terms of an amnesty.

As part of its required undertakings for joining the Council of Europe (COE), the Government pledged in January 2001 to pass a new law conforming to European standards on alternatives to military service within 3 years. Government officials stated that, according to their interpretation of COE regulations, those presently in prison as conscientious objectors were not required to be released until the new law was passed. However, COE officials stated that their interpretation was that the Government's undertaking required immediate release of such conscientious objectors. At the end of the period covered by this report, two different drafts of proposed legislation were circulating within the Government for comments. A local official of Jehovah's Witnesses said that they had no objection to any alternative forms of civil service; however, they could not take part in anything categorized as military service even if it did not involve bearing arms.

There are reports that hazing of new conscripts is more severe for Yezidis and other minorities and that military and civilian security officials' treatment of members of Jehovah's Witnesses is even harsher, because their refusal to serve in the military is seen as a threat to national survival.

By law, a religious organization that has been refused registration may not publish newspapers or magazines, rent meeting places, broadcast programs on television or radio, or officially sponsor the visas of visitors. During the period covered by this report, members of Jehovah's Witnesses did not report experiencing difficulty renting meeting places as in the past. Lack of official visa sponsorship means that Jehovah's Witnesses visitors must pay for tourist visas. In previous years, there were reports that government officials seized Jehovah's Witness publications at the border. Although members of Jehovah's Witnesses supposedly were allowed to bring in small quantities of printed materials for their own use, Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported that "spiritual letters" from one congregation to another, which they said were meant for internal rather than proselytizing purposes, continued to be confiscated by customs officials.

The International Helsinki Federation reported that in recent years there have been numerous allegations that members of non-traditional religions, including Jehovah's Witnesses, have been dismissed from their jobs or physically attacked due to their faith. In May the country's highest court reinstated Zempfira Voskanyan to her position as financial controller for a regional police division after having been fired for her membership in the Jehovah's Witnesses. Voskanyan returned to work but appealed the decision, challenging the constitutionality of an internal law enforcement regulation requiring all officers to be members of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The appeal was eventually dismissed on technical grounds. In 2001, Jehovah's Witnesses official Levon Markarian was arrested and charged under a Soviet-period antireligious law, which remains in force pending adoption by Parliament of a new Criminal Code, with "influencing people to refuse their civic duties" (i.e., serv-

ice in the military) and “leading children astray” by inviting them to unsanctioned religious meetings. In 2001 a court acquitted Markarian of the charge after a lengthy trial, and in 2002 the Appeals Court and the Court of Cassation, the country’s highest court, rejected the Procurator General’s appeal and upheld the acquittal. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) closely monitored the case.

Other than Jehovah’s Witnesses who were conscientious objectors, there were no other reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, societal attitudes towards some minority religions are ambivalent.

The Armenian Apostolic Church is a member of the World Council of Churches and, despite doctrinal differences, has friendly official relations with many major Christian denominations, including the Eastern Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and major Protestant churches. In 2001, the Armenian Apostolic Church celebrated the 1,700th anniversary of the official conversion of Armenia to Christianity. For this occasion, Pope John Paul II paid the first visit to the country by a head of the Roman Catholic Church, and Orthodox Patriarchs Bartholomew I of Constantinople and Aleksiy II of Moscow, along with numerous other religious figures, also visited Yerevan.

Suppressed through 70 years of Soviet rule, the Armenian Apostolic Church has neither the trained priests nor the material resources to fill immediately the spiritual void created by the demise of Communist ideology. Nontraditional religious organizations are viewed with suspicion, and foreign-based denominations operate cautiously for fear of being seen as a threat by the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Societal attitudes toward most minority religions are ambivalent. Many citizens are not religiously observant, but the link between religion and Armenian ethnicity is strong. As a result of the Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan, most of the country’s Muslim population was forced to leave the country. Antipathy towards Muslims remains a problem, and the few Muslims remaining in the country keep a low profile, despite generally amicable relations between the Government and Iran.

There was no officially sponsored violence reported against minority religious groups during the period. Yezidi children on occasion reported hazing by teachers and classmates. Some observers reported increasingly unfavorable attitudes toward members of Jehovah’s Witnesses among the general population, both because they are seen as “unpatriotic” for refusing military service and because of a widespread but unsubstantiated belief that they pay money to the desperately poor for conversions. The press reported a number of complaints lodged by citizens against members of Jehovah’s Witnesses for alleged illegal proselytizing. Jehovah’s Witness representatives reported a few cases during the year in which the Prosecutor General’s office sent official warnings to individual members regarding their proselytizing activities, and the group was at times the focus of religious attacks and hostile preaching by some Armenian Apostolic Church clerics.

Although it is difficult to document, it is likely that there is some informal societal discrimination in employment against members of certain religious groups.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and Embassy officials maintain close contact with the Catholicos at Etchmiadzin and with leaders of other major religious and ecumenical groups in the country. During the period covered by this report, Embassy officials met with the Military Prosecutor to discuss, among other topics, hazing of minority conscripts and the status of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and continued to meet with the government officials to urge that progress be made towards registering Jehovah’s Witnesses. The Embassy also maintains regular contact with traveling regional representatives of foreign-based religious groups such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses and raises their concerns with the Government. Embassy officials closely monitor trials

related to issues of religious freedom and take an active role in policy forums and NGO roundtables regarding religious freedom.

AUSTRIA

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

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is some societal mistrust and discrimination against members of some nonrecognized religious groups, particularly those referred to as “sects.” There was no marked deterioration in the atmosphere of religious tolerance in the country during the period covered by this report.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 32,368 square miles, and its population is an estimated 8.0 million. The largest minority groups are Croatian, Slovene, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, and Roma. In the past several years, the country has experienced a rise in immigration from countries such as Turkey and Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has increased the number of Muslims in the country.

According to the 2001 census, the memberships in major religions are as follows: Roman Catholic Church—74.0 percent; Lutheran Church (Augsburger and Helvetic Confessions)—4.7 percent; Islamic Community—4.2 percent; Jewish Community—0.1 percent; Eastern Orthodox (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian)—2.2 percent; other Christian churches—0.9 percent; other non-Christian religious groups—0.2 percent. Atheists accounted for 12 percent; 2 percent did not indicate a religious affiliation.

The vast majority of groups termed “sects” by the Government are small organizations with less than 100 members. Among the larger groups are the Church of Scientology, with between 5,000 and 6,000 members, and the Unification Church, with approximately 700 adherents throughout the country. Other groups found in the country include: the Brahma Kumaris, Divine Light Mission, Divine Light Center, Eckankar, Hare Krishna, the Holosophic community, the Osho movement, Sahaja Yoga, Sai Baba, Sri Chinmoy, Transcendental Meditation, Landmark Education, the Center for Experimental Society Formation, Fiat Lux, Universal Life, and The Family.

The provinces of Carinthia and Burgenland have somewhat higher percentages of Protestants than the national average, as the Counter-Reformation was less successful in those areas. The number of Muslims is higher than the national average in Vienna and the province of Vorarlberg, due to the higher number of guestworkers from Turkey in these provinces.

Approximately 17 percent of Roman Catholics actively participate in formal religious services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The status of religious organizations is governed by the 1874 Law on Recognition of Churches and by the 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities, which establishes the status of “confessional communities.” Religious organizations may be divided into three legal categories (listed in descending order of status): officially recognized religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. Each category of organizations possesses a distinct set of rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

Religious recognition under the 1874 law has wide-ranging implications, such as the authority to participate in the mandatory church contributions program, to provide religious instruction in public schools, and to bring into the country religious workers to act as ministers, missionaries, or teachers. Under the 1874 law, religious societies have “public corporation” status. This status permits religious societies to

engage in a number of public or quasi-public activities that are denied to confessional communities and associations. State subsidies for religious teachers at both public and private schools are provided to religious societies but not granted to other religious organizations.

Religious groups not recognized as religious societies under the 1874 law may choose to organize as associations under the Law of Associations. Some groups have organized as associations, even while applying for recognition as religious societies.

When the Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities came into effect in 1998, there were 12 recognized religious societies. Although the law allowed these 12 religious societies to retain their status, it imposed new criteria on other religious groups that seek to achieve this status, including a 20-year period of existence (at least 10 of which must be as a group organized as a confessional community under the 1998 law) and membership equaling at least two one-thousandths of the country's population (approximately 16,000 people). Of nonrecognized religious groups, only Jehovah's Witnesses meet this latter membership requirement; only 4 of the 13 recognized religious groups would meet the same requirement. Thirteen religious bodies are currently recognized as religious societies under the 1874 law: The Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church (Augsburger and Helvetic Confessions), the Islamic Community, the Old Catholic Church, the Jewish Community, the Eastern Orthodox Church (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, and Bulgarian), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the New Apostolic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Methodist Church of Austria, the Buddhist Community, and the Coptic Orthodox Church.

In 1998 Jehovah's Witnesses received the status of a confessional community. According to the law, after receiving such status, the group is subject to a 10-year period of existence as a confessional community under the 1998 law before they are eligible for recognition as a religious society. In April 2001, the Constitutional Court upheld a previous Education Ministry finding that Jehovah's Witnesses must fulfill the required 10-year waiting period.

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 doctrine is then examined for a determination that the group's basic beliefs do not violate public security, public order, health and morals, or the rights and freedoms of citizens.

Religious confessional communities, once they are recognized officially as such by the Government, have juridical standing, which permits them to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in their own names, contracting for goods and services, and other activities. The category of religious confessional community did not exist prior to the adoption of the 1998 law. A religious group that seeks to obtain this new status is subject to a 6-month waiting period from the time of application to the Ministry of Education and Culture. According to the Ministry, by the end of 2002, 13 groups had applied for the status of religious confessional community, and 11 were granted the new status. The Church of Scientology and the Hindu Mandir Association withdrew their applications. The Hindu Mandir Association reapplied under the name Hindu Religious Community and was granted the new status. The Ministry rejected the application of the Sahaja Yoga group in 1998.

The 10 religious groups that have constituted themselves as confessional communities according to the law are: Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baha'i Faith, the Baptists, the Evangelical Alliance, the Movement for Religious Renewal, the Free Christian Community (Pentecostals), the Pentecostal Community of God, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Hindu Religious Community, and the Mennonites. In March the Coptic Orthodox Church, which had been granted confessional community status under the 1998 law, became a recognized religious society.

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.

The Government provides subsidies to private schools run by any of the 13 officially recognized religious societies.

There are no restrictions on missionary activities. Although in the past nonrecognized religious groups had problems obtaining resident permits for foreign religious workers, administrative procedures adopted in 1997 have addressed this problem in part. Visas for religious workers of recognized religions are not subject to a numer-

ical quota. Visas for religious workers who are members of nonrecognized religions are subject to a numerical cap; however, this appears to be sufficient to meet demand. The Austrian Evangelical Alliance, the umbrella organization for nonrecognized Christian organizations, has reported some delays in obtaining visas for religious workers. Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses noted that they have been unable to get a visa for a Tagalog speaker to minister to their Filipino community.

No law expressly prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion in employment. In June the Government in conjunction with the Austrian Islamic Community hosted a conference in Graz of European Imams and heads of Muslim centers. Approximately 100 representatives of Islamic organizations in Europe attended the conference, which was the first of its kind in Europe.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The 1998 law allowed 12 previously recognized religious societies to retain their status; however, it imposed new criteria on other religious groups that seek to achieve that status. Numerous religious groups not recognized by the Government, 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.

Following a 1997 denial of recognition and a court appeal, in 1998 the Education Ministry granted Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a confessional community; the group immediately requested recognition as a religious society under the 1874 law. The Education Ministry denied the application on the basis that, as a confessional community, Jehovah's Witnesses would need to submit to the required 10-year waiting period. The group appealed this decision to the Constitutional Court, arguing that the requirement for a 10-year waiting period was unconstitutional. In April 2001, the Constitutional Court upheld the Education Ministry's finding. Jehovah's Witnesses filed an appeal with the Administrative Court, arguing that the law is illegal on administrative grounds. That appeal remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. In 1998 Jehovah's Witnesses also filed a complaint with the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR), arguing that the group had not yet been granted full status as a religious entity under the law, despite having made numerous attempts for more than 2 decades. In June the ECHR examined the case and sent a list of questions to the Government. The Government has until October to respond.

In 2002 the Ministry for Social Security and Generations ceased issuing its controversial brochure on nonrecognized religious groups. However, the Ministry and the City of Vienna were funding a controversial NGO that actively works against sects and cults (the Society against Sect and Cult Dangers.) This NGO distributes information to schools and the general public and runs a counseling center for those who believe they have been negatively affected by cults or sects.

The Federal Office of Sect Issues continues to function as a counseling center for those who have questions about sects and cults. Under the law, this office has independent status, but its head is appointed and supervised by the Minister for Social Security and Generations. The office's 2002 annual report to Parliament on its operations was not available at the time of this publication.

Several provinces funded offices that provided information on sects and cults. The website of the Family Office of the Government of Lower Austria included a presentation that negatively characterized many religious groups. The presentation included the Jehovah's Witnesses, despite its status as a confessional community.

The Austrian Branch of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom (ICRF) publicly attacked the CD-ROM entitled "The Search for Meaning: an Orientation Guide to Organizations that Offer the Solution." The CD-ROM contained information on a range of recognized and nonrecognized religious groups, including criticism of the Church of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses. The CD-ROM had been issued by the Catholic Diocese of Linz and contained a strong endorsement by the Deputy Governor of Upper Austria. In response to the ICRF's allegations, the Deputy Governor noted that the CD-ROM no longer was being produced. He also agreed that nonrecognized religious groups could submit a description of themselves for use on the Upper Austrian Education Intranet.

The conservative Austrian People's Party (OVP) position that party membership is incompatible with membership in a sect remained in force.

Prisoners who belong to nonrecognized religious groups are entitled to pastoral care. Some groups have reported experiencing problems with access to pastoral care in isolated instances; however, there are no allegations of widespread problems.

The Government provides funding for religious instruction in public schools and places of worship for children belonging to any of the 13 officially recognized religious societies. The Government does not offer such funding to nonrecognized religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. In some cases, religious societies decide that the administrative cost of providing religious instruction is too great to warrant providing such courses in all schools. Unless students 14 years of age and over (or their parents in the case of children under the age of 14) formally withdraw from religious instruction (if offered in their religion) at the beginning of the academic year, attendance is mandatory.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Relations among the 13 officially recognized religious societies are generally amicable. Fourteen Christian churches, among them the Roman Catholic Church, various Protestant confessions, and eight Orthodox and old-oriental churches are engaged in a dialog in the framework of the Ecumenical Council of Austrian Churches. The Baptists and the Salvation Army have observer status in the Council. The international Catholic organization "Pro Oriente," which promotes a dialog with the Orthodox churches, also is active in the country.

The Austrian Roman Catholic Church traditionally has been active in fostering amicable relations and promoting a dialog among the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic communities. The international Catholic group "Pax Christi," which pursues international interreligious understanding with projects involving Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism, has a chapter in the country.

There were no reports of violence or vigilante action against members of religious minorities. However, some societal mistrust and discrimination continues against members of some nonrecognized religious groups, particularly against those considered to be members of sects. A large portion of the public perceives such groups as exploiting the vulnerable for monetary gain, recruiting and brainwashing youth, promoting antidemocratic ideologies, and denying the legitimacy of government authority. Societal discrimination against sects is, at least in part, fostered by the Government.

Muslims have complained about incidents of societal discrimination. They reported that a school in Vienna distributed a working paper that turned the five pillars of Islam into a preparation for battle. They also have complained of incidents of verbal harassment. In December 2002, the Muslim section of the city cemetery in Traun was vandalized. Approximately 40 gravestones were broken, torn out, or destroyed. Police had not identified any potential suspects at the end of the period covered by this report.

Sensitivity to Scientology in the country remains an issue. The Church of Scientology has reported that individual Scientologists have experienced discrimination in hiring. Scientology leaders complained that their bank account was closed without cause. They also noted that the city government would not give them permission to erect an informational tent on one of the squares in downtown Vienna. However, Scientology leaders also noted that the Vienna Provincial Tax Authority granted them tax-exempt, non-profit status.

The Austrian Jewish Community (IKG) is facing severe financial problems and has requested additional subsidies from the Government. The IKG rejected offers by the Government for interest-free loans, stating the solutions offered were inadequate and did not address the community's long-term financial problems. In a public interview, the head of the Jewish community complained about latent anti-Semitism that occasionally surfaces in the form of phone threats and verbal assaults. During the period covered by this report, there were incidents of desecration of Jewish cemeteries.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Embassy monitors the Government's adherence to religious tolerance and freedom of expression as part of its evaluation of the Government's policies and commitments to freedom of expression.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officers regularly meet with religious and political leaders to reinforce the U.S. Government's commitment to religious freedom and tolerance and to discuss the concerns of nongovernmental organizations and religious communities regarding the Government's policies towards religion. In the fall of 2002 and the spring of 2003, the Embassy made a special attempt to reach out to members of the Islamic community through roundtable discussions and digital videoconferences. The Embassy's Public Affairs Office highlights religious freedom and tolerance in its programs.

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 slight improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. While some religious groups reported delays in and denials of registration, several churches have indicated that they either received or expect to receive their registration, they are able to import religious literature, and they meet without government interference. However, local authorities occasionally monitor religious services, and officials at times harassed nontraditional religious groups.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is popular prejudice against Muslims who convert to non-Muslim faiths and hostility towards groups that proselytize, particularly Evangelical Christian and missionary groups.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Embassy is engaged actively in monitoring religious freedom and maintains contact with the Government and a wide range of religious groups.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

According to official figures, the country has a total area of 33,774 square miles, and its population is approximately 8 million. There are no reliable statistics on memberships in various faiths; however, according to official figures approximately 96 percent of the population is nominally Muslim. The rest of the population adheres to other faiths or consists of nonbelievers. Among the Muslim majority, religious observance is relatively low and Muslim identity tends to be based more on culture and ethnicity than religion, although imams reported increased attendance at mosque during 2002. The Muslim population is approximately 70 percent Shi'a and 30 percent Sunni; differences traditionally have not been defined sharply.

The vast majority of the country's Christians are Russian Orthodox whose identity, like that of Muslims, tends to be based as much on culture and ethnicity as religion. Christians are concentrated in the urban areas of Baku and Sumgait. Most of the country's Jews belong to one of two groups: The "Mountain Jews" are descendants of Jews who sought refuge in the northern part of the country more than 2,000 years ago, and a smaller group of "Ashkenazi" Jews, descendants of European Jews who migrated to the country during Russian and Soviet rule.

These four groups (Shi'a, Sunni, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish) are considered traditional religious groups. There also have been small congregations of Evangelical Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Molokans (Russian Orthodox old-believers), Seventh-day Adventists, and Baha'is in the country for more than 100 years. In the last 10 years, a number of new religious groups that are considered foreign or nontraditional have been established. These include "Wahhabist" Muslims, Pentecostal and Evangelical Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hare Krishnas.

There are fairly sizeable expatriate Christian and Muslim communities in the capital city of Baku; authorities generally permit these groups to worship freely.

The Government is concerned about Islamic missionary groups (predominately Iranian and Wahhabist) that operate in the country, whose activities have been restricted in recent years. The Government closed several foreign-backed Islamic organizations as a result of reported connections to terrorist activity.

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 choice, and to practice his or her religion. The Law on Religion expressly prohibits the Government from interfering in the religious activities of any individual or group; however, there are exceptions, including cases where the activity of a religious group “threatens public order and stability.”

A number of legal provisions enable the Government to regulate religious groups, including a requirement in the Law on Religion that religious organizations be registered by the Government. The State Committee for Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA), which replaced the Department of Religious Affairs in June 2001, assumed responsibility for the registration of religious groups from the Ministry of Justice. Government authorities gave SCWRA and its chairman, Rafiq Aliyev, sweeping powers for registration; control over the publication, import, and distribution of religious literature; and the ability to suspend the activities of religious groups violating the law.

Registration enables a religious organization to maintain a bank account, rent property, and generally act as a legal entity. Lack of registration exposes groups to charges that they are illegal and makes it difficult, but not impossible, for a religious group to function. The process is burdensome, and there are frequent, lengthy delays in obtaining registration. Religious groups are permitted to appeal registration denials to the courts.

Unregistered groups were more vulnerable to attacks and closures by local authorities. Following a number of attacks in 1999, President Heydar Aliyev spoke publicly and in detail about the Government’s commitment to religious freedom. As a result, a number of groups with long-pending registration applications were registered, including Pentecostal and Baptist churches, as well as Jehovah’s Witnesses. In August 2001, religious groups were called upon to reregister with SCWRA, marking the third time that religious groups have been asked to reregister since the country’s independence in 1991.

To register, religious groups must complete a seven-step application process that is cumbersome, opaque, arbitrary, and restrictive. One of the primary complaints is the requirement to indicate a “religious center,” which requires additional approval by appropriate government authorities if it is located outside the country. Board members also are required to provide their place of employment. Many groups have reported that SCWRA employees charged with handling registration-related paperwork repeatedly argued over the language in statutes and also instructed some groups on how to organize themselves. SCWRA has taken a particularly strict approach to the registration of minority religious communities outside of Baku and has failed to prevent local authorities from illegally banning such communities.

By the end of the period covered by this report, 199 religious groups were registered successfully, compared with 406 that were registered previously. The majority of the registered groups were Muslim. SCWRA estimates that 2,000 religious groups are in operation; many have not filed for reregistration. Among minority religious communities that have faced re-registration problems was the Baptist denomination. Of its five main churches, three have gained reregistration. In April the Baku International Fellowship church was registered after a multi-year battle. In June SCWRA registered an Adventist Church in Naxchivan after the Ministry of Justice revoked its earlier registration.

The Law on Religious Freedom also prohibits foreigners from proselytizing, which the Government enforces. The law permits the production and dissemination of religious literature with the approval of SCWRA; however, the authorities also appeared to restrict individuals selectively from importing and distributing religious materials. The procedure for obtaining permission to import religious literature remains burdensome, but religious organizations report that it is becoming more regular and that the SCWRA appears to be handling requests more effectively.

Muslim organizations are subordinate to the Spiritual Directorate of All-Caucasus Muslims, a Soviet-era Muftiate, which appoints Muslim clerics to mosques, monitors sermons, and organizes annual pilgrimages to Mecca for the Hajj. Although it remains the first point of control for Muslim groups wishing to register with SCWRA according to the Law on Religious Freedom, it also has been subject to interference by SCWRA, which has attempted to share control with the Spiritual Directorate over the appointment and certification of clerics and internal financial control of the

country's mosques. Some Muslim religious leaders object to interference from both the Spiritual Directorate and SCWRA.

Religious instruction is not mandatory in public schools. In 2002 SCWRA continued its campaign to institute a mandatory religion course in all secondary schools. A draft textbook, authored by the SCWRA Chairman, dedicates the majority of the text to Islam but includes a small portion on other traditional faiths and on some non-traditional Christian faiths. Ministry of Education officials have not approved the class, which would conflict with constitutional laws protecting secular education.

The Government has worked actively to bring leaders of various faiths together for discussions. SCWRA convened leaders of various religious communities on several occasions to resolve disputes in private and has provided forums for visiting officials to discuss religious issues with religious figures. In October 2002, SCWRA and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Organization for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) jointly sponsored a conference in Baku on religious freedom and combating terrorism. In March the European Jewish community in Baku opened the largest synagogue in the Caucasus in a ceremony that representatives of the Government, leaders of the Muslim and Christian religious communities, and members of the diplomatic corps attended. In May an Udin-Albanian church destroyed by the tsarist Russian regime in 1836 was reopened.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted some religious freedom during the period covered by this report. SCWRA continued to delay or deny registration to a number of protestant Christian groups, including two Baptist churches. At the end of the period covered by this report, the SCWRA had registered less than half the number of religious communities previously registered. Some groups reported that SCWRA employees tried to interfere in the internal workings of their organizations during the registration process. Although unregistered religious groups continued to function, some reported official harassment, including break-ups of religious services and police intimidation and beatings of worshippers by police. SCWRA also failed to prevent local authorities from illegally banning minority groups outside of Baku.

At the end of the period covered by this report, the ethnic Azeri "Love" Baptist church continued to conduct services pending another appeal to the Supreme Court after charges were brought against Sari Mirzoyev, the pastor of the church, for insulting Muslim fasting traditions in a sermon during the holy month of Ramadan. Mirzoyev has been prohibited from conducting sermons since December 2001.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have had difficulties in holding large meetings in Baku. In September 2002, they planned a convention for 500 people and obtained official permission. Circumstances required them to change their venue; as a result, they received a letter from the SCWRA saying that they had broken the law by changing their plans without notifying SCWRA and by allowing unaccompanied minors to attend.

Under the law, 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.

Local law enforcement authorities occasionally monitor religious services, and some observant Christians and Muslims are penalized for their religious affiliations. Although there are no legal restrictions to large groups of religious observers gathering publicly, it is discouraged by local authorities. Both Jehovah's Witnesses and the Pentecostal "Cathedral of Praise" church reported that authorities interfered with their ability to rent public halls for religious gatherings.

The Law on Religious Freedom expressly prohibits religious proselytizing by foreigners, and this is enforced strictly. Government authorities have deported several Iranian and other foreign clerics operating independently of the organized Muslim community for alleged violations of the law.

Some religious groups continued to report some restrictions and delays in the import of religious literature by some government ministries, although SCWRA has also facilitated the import of such literature. In December 2002, SCWRA denied a Baku bookstore permission to import 400 religious books on the grounds that the store was not a "religious organization." SCWRA officials told foreign diplomats that they had blocked the import of Islamic literature that did not accord with the country's values. In October 2002, authorities returned 20,000 of the 35,000 books seized in 1996 from the Baku Society of Krishna Consciousness.

No religious identification is required in passports or other identity cards. In 1999 a court decided in favor of a group of Muslim women who sued for the right to wear headscarves in passport photos; however, the Center for Protection of Conscience and Religious Persuasion Freedom (DEVAMM) reports that authorities still prohibit

Muslim women from wearing headscarves in passport photos. In spring 2002, students at Baku State University and the Baku Medical Institute reportedly were instructed to refrain from wearing headscarves to classes; however, according to DEVAMM, the issue ceased to be a problem.

During the reporting period, the Government took no action on the return of places of worship seized during the Soviet period, which included the city's European (Ashkenazi) synagogue, the Lutheran church, and a Baptist church.

Press reports indicate that in the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region, a predominantly ethnic Armenian area over which the authorities have no control, the Armenian Apostolic Church enjoys a special status. The Armenian Church's status also results in serious restrictions on the activities of other confessions, primarily Christian groups. The ongoing state of war (which is regulated by a cease-fire) has led to hostility among Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh toward Jehovah's Witnesses, whose beliefs prohibit the bearing of arms. Courses in religion are mandatory in Nagorno-Karabakh schools. The largely Muslim ethnic Azeri population in Nagorno-Karabakh, who fled the region during the conflict with Armenia in the 1990s, has not been able to return to the country.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Sporadic violations of religious freedom by some officials continued. In the northern city of Khachmaz, there were reports that local policemen beat Muslim worshippers, who have denied any wrongdoing and complained to government authorities. Some family members of the accused also were called in for questioning by police. Also during the period covered by this report, some Muslim worshippers in Ganja and Khachmaz reportedly were arrested and beaten as suspected Wahhabis with links to terrorism. In January the Military Court for Grave Crimes began an investigation of the Baku "Abu-Bekr" mosque's activities after 13 persons who reportedly attended it were convicted for their intention to fight for the Chechens in Chechnya. In November 2002, security forces detained Imam Kazim Aliyev of Juma Mosque in Ganja on charges of preparing a coup d'etat.

In many instances, abuses reflected the popular antipathy towards ethnic Azeri converts to Christianity and other nontraditional religions. DEVAMM reported that an Adventist family in Naxchivan was harassed by local authorities, who barred three of their children from attending school, and attempted to deport the family to Baku in spring 2002. In early 2002, authorities arrested a few members of the Pentecostal and Baptist churches in Sumgait and sentenced them to short prison sentences. In April 2002, three employees at a mosque in Ganja were detained for 3 weeks before being released.

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. In May 2002, government authorities sentenced several members of a religious extremist group Hizb ut-Tahrir to 6-7 years imprisonment for allegedly planning terrorist attacks. There also were reports that the Government harassed Muslim groups due to security concerns. In 2002 authorities closed 22 of the country's 26 madrassahs (Islamic schools) allegedly for violating religious education norms.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Religious groups in the country report improvements in their ability to function freely. Several churches have indicated that they either received or expect to receive their registration, they were able to import religious literature, and they met without government interference.

During the reporting period, the Government has registered 74 more religious groups. Of particular importance, this spring the SCWRA registered the Baku International Fellowship Church after a multi-year battle and an Adventist Church in Naxchivan. The latter's pastor also reported that authorities ceased interfering with its members' right to worship and that the Chair of the SCWRA gave him a letter guaranteeing the church's right to exist.

Several religious groups have reported fewer restrictions on the import of religious literature during the reporting period. In November 2002, government officials

granted permission to the Evangelical Christian Baptist Church in Baku to import 3,000 religious books, after refusing permission for 6 months.

During the reporting period, the Government worked actively to promote inter-faith understanding. SCWRA convened leaders of various religious communities on several occasions to resolve disputes in private and has provided forums for visiting officials to discuss religious issues with religious figures. In October 2002, SCWRA and OSCE/ODIHR jointly sponsored a conference in Baku on religious freedom and combating terrorism.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there is popular prejudice against Muslims who convert to non-Muslim faiths and hostility towards groups that proselytize, particularly Evangelical Christian and missionary groups. This has been accentuated by the unresolved conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. During the reporting period, newspapers and television broadcasts depicted small, vulnerable religious groups as a threat to the identity of the nation, undermining the country's traditions of inter-faith harmony, which led to local harassment.

Throughout the reporting period, articles critical of Wahhabism and Christian missionaries appeared in many newspapers in the country.

Religious proselytizing by foreigners is against the law, and there is vocal opposition to it.

Hostility also exists toward foreign (mostly Iranian and Wahhabist) Muslim missionary activity, which partly is viewed as seeking to spread political Islam and therefore as a threat to stability and peace. The media targeted some Muslim communities that the Government claimed were involved in illegal activities.

Prominent members of the Russian Orthodox and Jewish communities report that there are no official or societal restrictions on their freedom to worship.

Hostility between Armenians and Azeris, intensified by the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, remains strong. In those portions of the country controlled by Armenians, all ethnic Azeris have fled and those mosques that have not been destroyed are not functioning. Animosity toward ethnic Armenians elsewhere in the country forced most ethnic Armenians to depart, and all Armenian churches, many of which were damaged in ethnic riots that took place more than a decade ago, remain closed. As a consequence, the estimated 10,000 to 30,000 ethnic Armenians who remain in the country are unable to attend their traditional places of worship.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador repeatedly conveyed U.S. concerns about the registration process to the Chairman of SCWRA and expressed strong concerns about the Government's commitment to religious freedom with others in the Government and publicly in the press. The Embassy also repeatedly expressed objections to the censorship of religious literature. In 2002 visiting U.S. Government officials discussed issues of religious freedom with authorities in the country and met with members of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian faiths to hear their concerns, as well as with members of human rights advocacy groups.

The Ambassador and Embassy officers maintain close contacts with leading Muslim, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish religious officials, and regularly meet with members of non-official religious groups in order to monitor religious freedom.

In November 2002, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar for leaders of the country's major religious communities, and in March the Embassy reiterated its support for religious tolerance by attending the opening of the European Jewish Synagogue in Baku.

BELARUS

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

The status of respect for religious freedom worsened during the period covered by this report. On October 31, 2002, the Government implemented a new law on religion, ignoring widespread domestic and foreign opposition. The law strongly restricts religious freedom. On June 12, the Government and the Belarusian Orthodox

Church (BOC), a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church, signed a Concordat that many consider to elevate the BOC's status, providing the Church with privileges not enjoyed by other faiths. Authorities continued to harass other denominations and religions. The Government has repeatedly rejected the registration applications of some of these, including many Protestant denominations, the Belarusian Orthodox Autocephalous Church (BAOC), and some Eastern religions. Without registration, many of these groups find it difficult, if not impossible, to rent or purchase property to conduct religious services. The authorities continued to enforce a 1995 Cabinet of Ministers decree that restricts the activities of religious workers in an attempt to protect Orthodoxy and curtail the growth of other religions. During the period covered by this report, the government-run media continued to attack Protestant and other non-Orthodox religious groups. Despite continued harassment, some minority faiths have been able to function if they maintain a low profile, while others have openly declared their refusal to seek reregistration under the new religion law.

There are, for the most part, amicable relations among registered, traditional religious communities; however, anti-Semitism persisted, and negative attitudes toward minority faiths continued to increase.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues, including specific cases, and the poor human rights situation in the country with the Government, and called upon the authorities to ensure that the right to worship be provided to all citizens.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 76,810 square miles, and its population is approximately 9,990,000.

The country historically has been an area of interaction, as well as competition and conflict, between Russian Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Repression under the Russian and Soviet empires resulted in a shift from the Greek Rite Catholic Church to the Orthodox Church as the majority religion, and a culture that is largely secular in orientation. According to a 1998 opinion poll, less than half of the population believed in God and approximately 60 percent identified for cultural or historical reasons with the Russian Orthodox Church. The Government indicates that of all persons who profess a religious faith approximately 80 percent belong to the Belarusian Orthodox Church and approximately 15 to 20 percent are estimated to be either practicing Roman Catholics or identify themselves with the Roman Catholic Church (the second largest religious grouping). Between 50,000 and 90,000 persons identify themselves as Jews. There are a number of Protestants and adherents to the Greek Rite Catholic Church and the Belarus Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Other minority religious faiths include, but are not limited to, the following: Hare Krishnas, Hindus, Baha'i, Seventh-day Adventist, Old Believer, Muslim (the Supreme Administration of Muslims, abolished in 1939, reestablished in early 1994), Jehovah's Witnesses, Apostolic Christian, Calvinist, and Lutheran. A small community of ethnic Tatars, with roots dating back to the 11th century, practices Islam.

The country was designated an Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in 1989, thereby creating the BOC. Under the leadership of Patriarchal Exarch Filaret, the number of Orthodox parishes throughout the country had grown to approximately 1,265 by the end of the period covered by this report. There were approximately 400 Roman Catholic parishes in the country. The Roman Catholic presence traditionally has been stronger in areas under Polish influence in the west and north; however, the ethnic Polish community, numbering at least 400,000 persons, does not account for the total number of Roman Catholics, as parishes are found throughout the country. Sensitive to the dangers of the Roman Catholic Church being viewed as a "foreign" church or as a political threat, the Head of the Church has tried to keep out of the country's internal political problems. Although the Cardinal has prohibited the display of Polish national symbols in churches and encouraged the use of Belarusian in church services, some priests continued to conduct services in Polish for congregations of Polish speakers.

It is estimated that approximately 120,000 citizens were considered to have Jewish "nationality" near the end of the Soviet period in 1989, compared to between 50,000 and 90,000 at the end of the period covered by this report. At least half of the present Jewish population is thought to live in or near Minsk. A majority of the country's Jews are not actively religious. Of those who are, most are believed to be either Reform or Conservative. There is also a small but active Lubavitch community. In 2002 a Jewish Community Center, with foreign assistance opened in Minsk.

Adherents of Protestant faiths, while still small, are growing in number. Since 1990 the number of Protestant congregations, registered and unregistered, has more than doubled and totals more than 1,000 according to government and independent

sources. Protestant faiths, although historically relatively small in the country, have been active in the country for hundreds of years. The two largest Protestant groups are registered under separate Pentecostal and Baptist unions. A significant number of Protestant churches, including charismatic and Pentecostal groups, remain unregistered.

There are a number of congregations of the Greek Rite Catholic Church, which once had a membership of approximately three-quarters of the population but suffered from severe persecution under Russian and Soviet rule. Following the 1991 reestablishment of Belarusian independence, the attempt to revive the Church, which maintains Orthodox rituals but is in communion with the Vatican, has had only limited success.

On November 14, 2002, a new Muslim organization, the Spiritual Office of Muslims, was established following a split within the Belarusian Muslim Religious Association, the main organizational body of the 30,000 Muslims in the country. Although the Spiritual Office of Muslims claims that 90 percent of the Muslim community belongs to this new Muslim organization, this claim cannot be confirmed.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in practice. Although the 1996 amended Constitution reaffirms the equality of religions and denominations before the law, it also contains restrictive language that stipulates that cooperation between the State and religious organizations "is regulated with regard for their influence on the formation of spiritual, cultural, and country traditions of the Belarusian people."

A 2001 Presidential Edict reconstituted the State Committee for Religious and Nationalities Affairs as the Committee of Religious and Nationalities Affairs of the Council of Ministers (CRNA). The CRNA regulates all religious matters in the country.

On October 31, 2002, President Lukashenko formally signed a new religion law into effect, despite protests from international and domestic human rights organizations, the European Union, and domestic religious groups, including Orthodox religious groups not affiliated with the BOC. On June 27, 2002, members of the lower house of the National Assembly overwhelmingly voted to postpone discussion of the religion law until the Fall session; however, on June 28, 2002, after intense government pressure, the lower house assembled its deputies, and they overwhelmingly voted to approve the draft law. The vote was taken, despite the fact that several deputies were unable to make the meeting. Media and eyewitness reports indicated that debate on the law was highly emotional, with some deputies allegedly exchanging profanity and anti-Semitic insults. The law recognizes the historical importance of the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Judaism, Sunni Islam and Evangelical Lutheranism, groups commonly referred to as traditional faiths in society, as well as the "determining role of the Orthodox Church in the historical formation and development of spiritual, cultural and state traditions of the Belarusian people."

The law contains a number of very restrictive elements that increase the Government's control of the activities of religious groups. It requires all religious groups to receive prior governmental approval to import and distribute literature and prevents foreigners from leading religious organizations, yet denies groups the right to establish religious schools to train their own clergy. Further, the law establishes complex registration requirements that many religious groups, both traditional and nontraditional, will have difficulty fulfilling. The new law required all registered groups to reregister within 2 years and effectively banned immediately all religious activity of unregistered religious groups. Some registered religious groups may not be able to meet many of the new requirements; however, officials have stated publicly that no group that was registered when the law was enacted would lose its registration status. While leaders of some minority religious groups are skeptical of this assurance, there were no reports of the Government denying reregistration to previously registered religious groups during the period covered by this report.

The BOC has hailed the law, which according to Metropolitan Filaret, "offers additional protection of citizens from pseudo-religious forces and opens new prospects of cooperation between the state and the church." Similarly, the CRNA claimed that the law's adoption is necessary to protect society from so-called "destructive and pseudo-religious groups" that the Government claims are active in the country. Despite this claim, the Government has been unable to provide evidence that such groups exist. Although the Government has repeatedly cited the approval of the law by traditional faiths, members of these groups have expressed concerns with the law.

The new law establishes a three-tiered structure of religious groups: Religious communities, religious associations, and Republican religious associations. Religious communities, or local individual religious organizations, must comprise 20 people over the age of 18 who must live in neighboring areas. To register, the community must submit a list of founders with their full names, place of residence, citizenship, and signatures; copies of their founding statutes; minutes of their founding meeting; and permission confirming the community's right to any property indicated in their founding statutes. For those communities practicing religions not previously known to the Government, information on their faith must also be submitted. According to the law, the Oblast Executive Committees (for those groups outside of Minsk) or the Minsk City Executive Committee handle all application requests. While the law denies communities the right to establish institutions to train religious clergy, it permits them to operate Sunday schools.

Religious associations are comprised of 10 communities, 1 of which must have been active in the country for at least 20 years and can only be formed by a Republican (national level) religious association. To register, associations must provide a list of members of the managing body with biographical information, proof of permission that the association can be located at its designated location, and minutes from the founding congress of the association. By law, associations have the exclusive right to establish religious educational institutions, invite foreigners to work with respective religious groups, and organize cloister and monastic communities.

Republican religious associations are formed only when there are active religious communities in the majority of the oblasts in the country. By law, all applications to establish associations and Republican associations must be submitted to the CRNA.

On June 12, the Prime Minister and Metropolitan Filaret signed a Concordat between the BOC and the Government. The Concordat guarantees the BOC autonomy in its internal affairs and the ability to fulfill all religious rights, as well as the right to consider itself in a special relationship with the State. It recognizes the BOC's "influence on the formulation of spiritual, cultural and national traditions of the Belarusian people." The Concordat calls for the Government and the BOC to cooperate in implementing policy in various fields, including education, development and protection of cultural legacies, and security. Although it states that the agreement will not limit the religious freedoms of other faiths, the Concordat calls for the Government and the BOC to combat unnamed "pseudo-religious structures that present a danger to individuals and society."

The Government refers to those groups it does not consider to be traditional faiths as "nontraditional," and government officials and state media also widely use the term "sect" when referring to nontraditional religious groups, although it is not an official designation. Authorities deny legal registration at the national level to nontraditional faiths and to all of those considered to be sects. The Government generally considers Protestant groups to be nontraditional, but it sometimes also considers some of them to be sects. As of March, the CRNA reported that there are 26 registered religions and 2,825 religious communities, of which 1,265 are Belarusian Orthodox, 492 are Evangelical Christian, 432 Roman Catholic, and 268 Baptist. Some congregations are registered only on a local basis, which provides only limited rights. Only congregations registered nationally are allowed to invite foreign religious workers and open new churches. While all registered religious organizations enjoy tax-exempt status, government subsidies appear limited to the BOC. Government employees are not required to take any kind of religious oath or practice elements of a particular faith.

Under regulations issued in 2001, the Government requires an invitation for representatives of foreign religious organizations to visit the country. Representatives must obtain a visa and permission from the CRNA, even if their visit is for nonreligious purposes such as charitable activities. The inviting organization must make a written request to invite foreign clergy, including the dates and reason for the visit. The CRNA has 20 days in which to respond and there is no provision for appeal of the CRNA's decision. Legislation restricts "subversive activities" by foreign organizations in the country and prohibits the establishment of offices of foreign organizations whose activities incite "national, religious and racial enmity" or could "have negative effects on the physical and mental health of the people."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government increased its harassment of religious groups based not only upon the religion law, but also on directives that provide additional rules and requirements for religious groups that are not outlined in the law.

During the reporting period, the CRNA continued to deny registration to several religious groups. Authorities continued to refuse registration to the Hindu group

“Light of Kaylasa,” which has sought registration since 1992. Other religious groups such as the Unification Church and the Church of Scientology have also been denied registration.

On January 30, the CRNA issued a document containing methodological recommendations on registering and reregistering religious groups. According to the CRNA, these recommendations, which the Ministry of Justice did not approve, are intended to streamline registration and reregistration for all religious groups. It claims that this document is an internal document with no legal force; however, local officials used these recommendations to deny registration to a Church of Scientology religious community in Minsk.

In December 2002, a Minsk city Church of Scientology religious community submitted their application for registration with the CRNA. The CRNA later informed the group that their application was suspended because additional information about their religion was required and provided a list of 264 additional issues that the Church needed to address.

On October 18, 2002, a Minsk district court upheld the August 2002 decision by the CRNA to deny registration to a Hare Krishna religious association on the grounds that the association’s legal address was not valid. The decision was made despite the fact that the legal address had been issued by local authorities. The CRNA’s decision was made 17 months after the group had initially submitted its application in 2001. The group appealed the decision in the City and Supreme Courts in November 2002 and May 2003, respectively. Both courts upheld the decision to deny registering the religious association.

Authorities continued to refuse to register the BAOC. In October 2002, a BAOC community in Berestovitsky district submitted an application for registration, which local authorities rejected. The Government claimed that in 2001 it offered the Church the possibility of registration in Berestovitsky district if it dropped the word “Orthodox” from the name, but the Church refused. Although neither the Government nor the BOC recognizes Father Ian Spasyuk as a priest, he serves as the priest in charge of BAOC parishes for a faction that has close ties to the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The BAOC is unable to train a sufficient number of priests to meet the growing needs of its parishioners in its 70 parishes because of its inability to register a seminary.

With or without official registration, some faiths have great difficulty renting or purchasing property to establish places of worship, difficulty building churches (e.g., the Greek Catholics and Protestant groups) or openly training clergy.

Citizens theoretically are not prohibited from proselytizing and may speak freely about their religious beliefs; however, authorities often intervene to prevent, interfere with, or punish individuals who proselytize on behalf of an unregistered religion. The Government continued to enforce a 1995 Council of Ministers decree that regulates the activities of religious workers. A 1997 Council of Ministers directive permits the teaching of religion at youth camps for registered religious groups.

Foreign missionaries are not permitted to engage in religious activities outside of the institutions that invited them. The law requires 1-year, multiple-entry “spiritual activities” visas for foreign missionaries. According to the CRNA, in 2002 all visa requests from religious organizations were approved. CRNA statistics show that over 1,250 foreigners went to the country to work with domestic religious groups. Among them, 375 were Roman Catholic, 203 Pentecostals, 142 Orthodox, 123 Baptists, and 196 Jews. Despite these figures, religious groups continue to experience difficulties in obtaining visas, even those that have a long history in the country. As a result of its revival since 1991, the Roman Catholic Church has experienced a shortage of qualified native clergy. At times the Church has had difficulty getting permission from authorities to bring in a sufficient number of foreign religious workers, primarily from Poland, to make up for the shortage. Members of the Hare Krishna and Protestant communities reported that they have been unable to invite foreign clergy to participate in religious activity in their respective religious organizations.

Between 2001 and 2002, foreigners invited by the Roman Catholic Church who had previously been granted 1-year multiple entry visas, were at first issued 6-month visas and then received 3-month visas, without explanation. In December 2002, the Government ended the practice of issuing 3-month visas to foreign Roman Catholic religious workers and once again began to reissue 1-year validity visas at a higher price than was previously charged. In the past, foreign clergy or religious workers who did not register with the authorities or who tried to preach without government approval, or without an invitation and permission from a registered religious organization, have been expelled from the country; however, there were no reports of such expulsions during the period covered by this report. Approval for visits by foreign clergy or religious workers often involves a lengthy bureaucratic proc-

ess. Internal affairs agencies may expel foreign clergymen from the country by not extending their registration or by denying them temporary stay permits. These authorities may make decisions on expulsion on their own or based on recommendations from Religious Affairs Councils, regional executive committees, or the Religious Affairs Department of the Executive Committee of the city of Minsk.

A second Roman Catholic seminary was opened in Pinsk in September 2001, after one opened in Grodno in 1989. The Government indicated that in light of these new seminaries foreign priests would no longer be allowed to work in the country, although it did not always enforce this order at the local level and allowed at least some foreign priests to work. The Roman Catholic Church reported that local authorities in Grodno Oblast took steps to limit the number of foreign Roman Catholic workers and in April revoked the residence permits of and deported three foreign Roman Catholic nuns. Bishops must receive permission from the CRNA before transferring a foreign priest to another parish.

Since April, Grodno city authorities have repeatedly denied the registration of a foreign rabbi because he does not speak Belarusian or Russian.

There were no reports of discrimination against religious adherents in the military services. Those who object to serving in armed units work in either construction or engineering battalions.

According to the Government, the law permits residential property to be used for religious services once it has been converted from residential use. The Housing Code permits the use of such property for nonresidential purposes with the permission of local executive and administrative bodies. Since 2000 local authorities have enforced this statute, effectively requiring all religious organizations to reregister their properties. Government figures indicated in 2002 that 110 religious communities, including 34 Protestant denominations, had their property registered through this process; however, authorities continue to deny permission to many Protestant churches, as well as other nontraditional faiths, which become caught in circular requirements. They are denied permission to convert their properties for religious uses because these groups are not registered religious groups. However, an organization must have a legal address to register. Religious groups that cannot register often are forced to meet illegally or in the homes of individual members. A number of nontraditional Protestant faiths have not attempted to register because they do not believe that their applications would be approved.

On October 2, 2002, Grodno Oblast authorities issued a directive to movie theaters to sever all existing rental agreements with churches that were conducting religious services at their movie theaters. Following the directive, a Grodno movie theater cancelled an existing agreement to rent its theater to the Living Word Church.

On November 14, 2002, the Minsk Prosecutor's Office requested regional prosecutors to monitor the implementation of the religion law. The letter instructed local prosecutors to verify the validity of lease agreements where religious services are conducted, whether minors participated in such services, and whether local authorities had approved these meetings. One Pentecostal group reported that local authorities questioned local pastors and instructed them to provide information about their communities, including lists of minors, despite the fact that no such list is required under the religion law. The pastors refused to provide these lists.

In December 2002, the CRNA sent a letter to oblast authorities advising them of the need to assess public opinion before the new construction of religious buildings and the reconfiguration of existing buildings for religious purposes. According to the CRNA, authorities may cite negative public opinion as a reason to prevent religious groups from constructing or renovating religious property, even though this requirement is not established in the law.

During the period covered by this report, many traditional and nontraditional religious groups continued to experience problems obtaining property, due to government efforts to restrict the ability of these groups to establish houses of worship. During the reporting period, local authorities rescinded an earlier decision to allocate property to a Pentecostal community in the town of Druzhnii, claiming that the group should first ascertain the public opinion of the town. Oblast authorities overruled the decision and local authorities have since offered the community three plots of land from which to choose. Authorities continue to deny permission to the registered New Life Evangelical Church to build a church in Minsk.

On September 13, 2002, Ibragim Kanapatsky, deputy Mufti of the Muslim Religious Association of Belarus, accused Minsk city authorities of imposing a high tax on land allotted to the Association to build a mosque to deliberately hamper the construction of the city's only mosque. However, in April, the Minsk City Council decided to lower land tax for religious groups. This decision has been implemented to the satisfaction of the Muslim Religious Association.

In October 2002, local authorities in the Minsk Oblast town of Borovlyani refused to permit a registered Full Gospel community to renovate a privately built home into a church. The community had received all necessary permission from local authorities, and the religious affairs office of the Minsk Oblast promised the necessary notification that the group was registered. Despite the promise to issue the notification and the fact that only the Minsk Oblast authorities have the right to make such a decision, the religious affairs office rejected the application outright. The CRNA office cited a letter it received from several Orthodox townspeople that accused members of the Full Gospel community of illegally entering homes to proselytize, stealing Orthodox crosses from those wearing them, and belonging to an unregistered sect. The letter was reportedly prepared by the local BOC priest. Despite the group's appeal to the Procurator General to prove these charges, no investigation has occurred.

A government decree specifies measures to ensure public order and safety during public gatherings. Meeting hall officials have cited this decree as a basis for canceling or refusing to extend agreements with religious groups for the use of their facilities. Nontraditional groups were unable to rent space in meeting halls to conduct prayer services. According to the Full Gospel Evangelical Christian Church, during the reporting period, Minsk authorities have rejected at least five applications from the Church to rent space at a local meeting hall. In one case, on September 30, 2002, the Minsk City Court overturned a July 2002 decision by a local court to grant permission to rent the hall to the Church. During the reporting period, Protestants filed numerous requests to the CRNA to allow them to rent property to worship, most recently in June. In its responses, the CRNA claimed that only local authorities decide whether or not to grant such permission.

Although the Catholic Church opened a new church in Minsk in the first half of 2002, it cited difficulties in receiving permission from local authorities to build additional churches in Minsk. There were anecdotal reports of local officials denying land to Roman Catholic communities to construct churches in Brest Oblast.

Although it is registered officially, the Greek Catholic Church has experienced problems with the Government because of historical tensions between it and the Orthodox Church and its emphasis on the use of the Belarusian language. Along with some Protestant denominations, some Greek Catholic congregations also experienced difficulties renting venues for conducting services.

There were no reports of religious groups being evicted from property during the period covered by this report; however, authorities regularly broke up unsanctioned religious gatherings in apartments.

State-run periodicals as well as literature affiliated with the BOC continued to publish articles attacking Protestants and other nontraditional faiths. An article in the September 2002 issue of *Svyataya Rus* (Holy Russia) accused Protestants, Pentecostals, Hare Krishnas and others of fostering negative attitudes towards traditional faiths, of being unpatriotic, and of illicit drug use.

In April and May, the Minsk Community of Krishna Conscience and the Union of Evangelical Faith Christians filed separate appeals to the Procurator General's office to remove the textbook "Man, Society and State" from the educational curriculum. The book, published in 2002 and distributed throughout the country, discusses the various characteristics of religious sects. Both groups, which in the past have been described as sects, contend that the book espouses intolerance towards nontraditional faiths. According to the book, such groups believe in blind devotion to religious leaders, unconditional acceptance of doctrine, and voluntarily severance of all ties to society. The Ministry of Education's response on May 30 defended the use of the word "sect" as a scientific term and refused to remove the books from circulation or punish the writers of the book. The letter failed to respond to a Hare Krishna request for an explanation addressing the textbook's accusations about them. However, the Ministry promised not only to instruct teachers to devote more time in their lessons to this issue, but also to consider the concerns expressed by Hare Krishna and Evangelical Christian groups, as well as to revise the controversial text when the book is reprinted. Fearing for their safety, members of an unregistered Baptist community in Brest Oblast removed their children from classes. In March, the Ministry of Education released another textbook for religious instruction called *Religious Conduct* that describes Hare Krishnas, Evangelical Christians, and Scientologists as "neocults" and "sects."

During the reporting period, the government-run newspaper *Narodnaya Gazeta* continued to publish articles hostile towards Pentecostals in connection with the 2000 death of Igor Orlovsky, a Union of Evangelical Faith Christian deacon in the town of Starie Dorogi. The articles, which appeared in four issues, continued to allege that the pastor was sacrificed by Evangelical Christians. According to a January 2002 *Narodnaya Gazeta* article, the Church denied the requests of the deacon's

mother to provide medical assistance to her son, who was dying of liver cirrhosis. Following his death, the mother accused the Church of deliberately poisoning her son in order to sacrifice him. This story also had been covered during an April 2001 episode of a television program called "Human Rights: A Look at the World." The show's host, Yevgeny Novikov, interviewed the deacon's mother, who accused the Church of "sacrificing" her son. The deacon's mother filed a suit against the Union of Evangelical Faith Christians and the pastor of the Church in Starie Dorogi for moral damages; a Minsk court dismissed her case.

In May 2001, the Union of Evangelical Faith Christians filed a slander suit against Novikov, the Belarusian Television and Radio Company, Narodnaya Gazeta, and the deacon's mother. On April 1, the Minsk City Court upheld a prior district court ruling that Novikov had defamed Evangelical Christians and ordered Novikov to air an open apology. Novikov's apology was aired during the June 21 television program "Pa Sutnasti." Instead of offering an apology to Evangelical Christians, Novikov's presentation was filled with numerous anti-Protestant remarks, which included his apology to "the sectists." The program was aired on the state-owned Belarusian Television Channel. According to the CRNA, after receiving complaints from Pentecostal groups, it sent a request to Belarusian Television for a copy of the program to submit for examination. Belarusian Television refused to provide a copy of this program. In its response to the groups, the CRNA claimed that it was unable to render a decision on the content of the program and advised the groups to pursue their cases in court. The CRNA further claimed that on June 23, Novikov appeared on television and issued a second apology, for comments made during his June 21 program; however, Protestant groups have stated that no such apology was aired.

An issue of the state-run newspaper Respublika published on April 18 contained an article alleging that a student at a Mogilev school had fallen under the "dangerous" influence of a Scientologist instructor at school, and that he was returned from his "zombie" state after a year of psychiatric treatment. The article also claimed that Scientology was a destructive sect that was engaged in illegal activity in the country.

A series of state television documentaries that targeted Protestants, particularly Pentecostals, and Catholics as destructive groups that engage in fanatical rituals and pose a threat to society were broadcast in 2000 and 2001. In March and April 2001, a series shown on state television accused Protestant churches of engaging in human sacrifices, poisoning children, and other "destructive rituals." In the series, CRNA officials claimed that Protestant groups were undermining the authority of the regime, were agents of the West, and needed to be banned from the country. The CRNA and the courts rejected efforts by Catholic and Protestant groups to halt these broadcasts. According to one lower house deputy and Protestant groups, members of the BOC showed the program to lower house deputies, in an effort to persuade the lower house deputies to approve the religion law prior to its passage.

Restitution of religious property remained limited during the period covered by this report. There is no legal basis for restitution of property that was seized during the Soviet and Nazi occupations, and the law restricts the restitution of property that is being used for cultural or educational purposes. Many former synagogues in Minsk are used as theaters, museums, sports complexes, and even a German-owned beer hall; most of the Jewish community's requests to have these synagogues returned have been refused. The few returns of property to religious communities have been on an individual and inconsistent basis, and local government authorities in general are reluctant to cooperate. Over the past several years, the Jewish community has lobbied the authorities successfully to return several properties in Minsk and other cities. According to Jewish groups, the most recent instance of restitution occurred in June 2002, when local authorities returned a synagogue to the Jewish community in Bobrusk. In 2000 and 2001, authorities in Molodechno and Kalinkovichi returned property to the local Jewish communities. Although the Roman Catholic Church has been somewhat successful in obtaining former Church property, it reported that it had been unable to secure the return of 21 former Catholic churches by the end of the reporting period. The Greek Catholic Church has indicated that only one of the many houses of worship taken from it when the region was annexed to the Russian Empire had been returned. The Orthodox Church appears to have had the most success on the issue of property restitution; however, a number of restitution claims by the Orthodox Church remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report.

During the reporting period, government officials continued to take a number of actions that indicated a lack of sensitivity toward the Jewish community. In January renovative construction work commenced at a sports stadium in Grodno that had been originally built in the 1950s on the site of a former Jewish cemetery that existed since the 1600s. During the course of excavating the earth, workers at the

site found human remains, which were removed from the site to be collected for future reburial. Photographs taken by the Jewish community showed human remains, not only mixed in earth filling dump trucks, but also mixed with earth from the site and used to resurface a road. Despite appeals from the local Jewish community and international Jewish groups to halt construction, and mistreatment of remains, work continued at the site. However, Grodno authorities engaged in discussions with representatives of the local Jewish community to find an amicable solution that would include the reburial of remains according to Jewish tradition, with a memorial, but no formal agreement was reached between the local Jewish community and Grodno authorities by the end of the reporting period.

In September 2002, authorities in Mogilev decided to change the status of the city's Jewish cemetery, which authorities had officially designated as a Jewish cemetery in 2001, to a public cemetery. Following the decision, local authorities permitted the removal of human remains and headstones from existing gravesites to make room for non-Jewish burials. Remains found during the digging were left on the ground. In June the local Jewish community sent an appeal to President Lukashenko to halt such activity. Following the appeal and pressure on local authorities, the authorities banned all non-Jewish burials in the site of the Jewish cemetery. As of June 30, the community was seeking to annul the September 2002 decision and to restore the status of the cemetery as a Jewish cemetery.

On July 9, 2002, approximately 30 people from a local Jewish organization protested against the continued construction in downtown Minsk of an apartment complex on the sites where two synagogues were located. In November 2002, 75 of 109 deputies in the lower house of the National Assembly issued an appeal to President Lukashenko to prevent the destruction of Jewish cultural landmarks in Minsk. In December 2002, the State Control Committee rejected the appeal, responding on behalf of President Lukashenko.

On September 19, 2002, the Minsk City Court upheld a previous district court decision to reject the lawsuit of a local Jewish leader to rebuild one of the synagogues that was demolished in September 2001.

In January 2002, authorities in Brest arrested and later released a 17-year-old for desecrating a Holocaust memorial.

During the reporting period, the Government took some steps to address issues concerning the Jewish community. On July 24, 2002, President Lukashenko issued a statement that there were no grounds for anti-Semitism in the country. In May, after consultations with the CRNA and Prosecutor General, the Ministry of Information ordered the removal of the Russian newspaper "Russkii Vestnik" from kiosks and stores in Minsk. The decision came following the April 3 appeal by several Jewish leaders to remove the newspaper, which printed several anti-Semitic articles during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, government officials continued to publicly make anti-Semitic statements. During a November 25 interview with the newspaper *Belorusskaya Gazeta*, Chair of the International Affairs Committee of the lower house of parliament, Sergei Kastsyan, said he opposed attempts to "turn Belarus into a springboard for Zionism." He added, "If a mosque or a synagogue stands in the way of the city development plan, I believe it is acceptable to bulldoze it." His remarks were in response to an appeal on November 15 by lower house deputies to preserve Jewish landmarks.

In a November 23, 2002 article in *Narodnaya Gazeta*, Eduard Skobelyov, editor of the Presidential Administration newspaper, blamed the influence of the "tens of officially registered Jewish groups in Belarus" and international Jewish organizations for hindering the "fight for historical truth." Several Jewish groups have claimed that Skobelyov published several anti-Semitic articles while a member of the Belarusian Communist Party in the early 1990s.

Despite the decision to pull *Russkii Vestnik* from distribution, during the reporting period, anti-Semitic literature continued to be sold in government buildings and in stores and at events indirectly associated with the Belarusian Orthodox Church. Anti-Semitic literature was openly sold during the April Verbny Kirmash Orthodox book fair. Anti-Semitic and Russian ultra-nationalist newspapers were sold at *Pravoslavnaya Kniga* (Orthodox Bookstore), a store that sells Orthodox literature and religious paraphernalia.

The July/August 2002 issue of the state-run literary journal *Neman* published a short story by Alexander Prokhanov, editor in chief of the Russian ultra-nationalist newspaper *Zavtra*. The story "Mr. Hexagon" included numerous anti-Semitic references.

According to the CRNA, the Committee regularly responds to all public expressions of xenophobia by notifying the relevant government agencies responsible for

pursuing legal action against them; however, no such legal actions were observed during the reporting period.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the reporting period, the Government frequently took steps abusing the religious freedom of several religious groups. While local authorities in April issued passports to family members of BAOC priest Yan Spasyuk, who had been unable to obtain passports since November 2001, the Government took numerous actions against the BAOC priest and a BAOC community in the town of Pogranichny.

The Government continuously harassed, threatened and arrested members of the unregistered Hindu community Light of Kaylasa. On July 13, 2002, police arrested 18 members of this community as they were preparing to hold a meditation ceremony in a Minsk park. Several of those arrested were jailed for 2 days and heavily fined. On August 9, 2002, police broke up an outdoor wedding ceremony that was being conducted by the group. On August 17, 2002, police broke up a demonstration held by the group protesting against Government pressure on the Light of Kaylasa. Six members of the group were sentenced to 10 days imprisonment, including Tatiana Akadanava, the leader of the group, and her husband Sergei, who was the group's Priest. The Akadanavs reported that while in detention, police refused to intervene during an incident when a fellow inmate attacked and beat Tatiana and refused to render medical assistance. Members who were not jailed received heavy fines.

On March 17, members of a Pentecostal group filed a complaint against Nikolai Sinitsyn, Chairman of the town council of Slobodka. Sinitsyn, accompanied by another local official, broke up a Pentecostal prayer and bible-reading session in a private home. Sinitsyn warned those in attendance that they were engaged in an unauthorized prayer meeting and threatened to contact the police should they continue to meet.

Throughout the reporting period, several Pentecostals were fined for illegally conducting and hosting religious services. According to the CRNA, convictions for such offenses were based on charges of either disturbing public order or illegally gathering without prior permission. The law allows people to gather to pray in private homes; however, it provides restrictions on holding rituals, rites, or ceremonies in such locations and requires prior permission from local authorities for such events.

On May 25, police broke up a Hindu prayer service that was held in a Minsk apartment. The police warned the participants that such activity was illegal for unregistered religious groups and that they would be arrested in the future if they were to continue to conduct such activity. On June 1, police broke up another unsanctioned prayer meeting held in another apartment and ordered participants to leave. As participants were leaving, police armed with machine guns arrived, and after searching the worshipers, forced them on the floor as the police conducted a search of the apartment, which reportedly resulted in heavy damage. On June 25, authorities again broke up another unsanctioned prayer meeting and questioned the owner of the apartment.

During the reporting period, authorities harassed, fined, and detained several Hare Krishnas for illegally distributing religious literature. The group reported that authorities initially detained some of their members for illegally distributing literature and then fined them for irregularities with their visas or other documentation. In October 2002, a Hare Krishna distributing literature in Gomel was detained for three days. According to members of the Hare Krishna community, in December 2002, plainclothesmen in Kobryn used force to detain several followers who were distributing religious literature. The individuals were later fined.

On May 21, 2001, authorities rearrested BAOC priest Ian Spasyuk while he was attempting to hold a service in the village of Radaulyany (Berestavitsky district). Authorities then summoned Spasyuk and his wife to a local court where, in a closed hearing and without the ability to call witnesses or obtain legal assistance, Spasyuk was detained and fined for petty hooliganism. Following direct government pressure and harassment of their respective religious organizations, BAOC priest Yan Spasyuk and the Light of Kaylasa leaders Sergei Akadanav and Tatyana Akadanava left the country in 2003.

On September 16, 2002, the Keston News Agency quoted Aleksandr Antonyuk, a member of the Pogranichny unregistered BAOC community, who reported that several members of the BAOC were summoned to the local administration office in the town of Berastavitsa. Local authorities reportedly threatened BAOC members to either stop supporting Spasyuk or lose their jobs. Local authorities have denied these charges. In May Father Spasyuk's sister was fired from her job after Spasyuk declared his intention to seek political asylum. There has also been anecdotal evidence of Protestants being harassed at work due to their faith.

Members of the Light of Kaylasa that were fined for their participation in unsanctioned demonstrations and protests have reported that authorities have threatened them with confiscation of property and additional legal charges should their fines go unpaid. Authorities have also warned, threatened and harassed their family members for payment. On March 25, authorities forced the parents of one member of the group to pay the outstanding fine of their son. During the reporting period, members of the Light of Kaylasa reported being fired from their jobs due to their affiliation with the group. One member reported that she was fired because she was a "sektantka," member of a cult. Local authorities told employees of one company that their company would be closed since the company's director was a member of the group.

On October 2, 2002, local authorities issued a warning to Vasily Yurevich, Pastor of the New Life Church, for illegally protesting against the religion law. On November 8, 2002, the Keston News Agency reported that police detained two Roman Catholic demonstrators who protested against the new law on religion outside the Parliament building in Minsk. However, this report could not be confirmed by either the CRNA or the Roman Catholic Church.

On November 9, 2002, police and local authorities broke up a gathering of Scientologists in a Minsk apartment. Two people were fined approximately \$25 (50,000 rubles) for participating in an illegal gathering. Following an appeal by the group, a Minsk court overruled the fines on February 26.

On August 1, 2002, local authorities in the Grodno Oblast border town of Pogranichny demolished the church of the BAOB that they claimed was built illegally, because the building permit specified a private house. The church was demolished despite the fact that the community had been given construction permission in July 2001. Prior to the church's destruction, local authorities arrested three journalists at the site.

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

There are, for the most part, amicable relations among the registered, traditional, religious communities. According to an October 2002 poll conducted by the Independent Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Research, 57.7 percent of respondents favored equality between various religious groups, while 33 percent felt that the Orthodox Church should receive special government privileges. Anti-Semitism persisted and sentiment critical of minority faiths increased during the period covered by this report.

In two separate incidents in May and August 2002, skinheads attacked several foreign Jews in downtown Minsk. In one incident, police arrived at the scene but did not arrest the assailants. In September 2002, unknown assailants attacked a rabbi and his son near the Russian Embassy in Minsk. Local guards at the Embassy assisted the rabbi and notified the police who opened an investigation into the incident, but no significant action has been taken. On July 2, 2002, a synagogue in Gomel received a bomb threat from an unidentified individual. Police investigated the scene, but found no explosive device.

During the reporting period, unknown assailants assaulted several members of the Light of Kaylasa. One member of the group, Tatyana Zhilevich, was taken to a hospital with head injuries. On August 25, 2002, unknown individuals broke into a private apartment used by the group for religious services, vandalizing it and damaging the group's altar and other religious paraphernalia.

Jewish organizations continued to criticize the Government for failing to protect cemeteries and Holocaust memorials. In May and June, unknown assailants vandalized both Jewish and non-Jewish gravesites at three Gomel cemeteries. Although the authorities launched criminal investigations into the incidents, no arrests have been made. In April and July 2002, approximately 70 tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Borisov and 19 tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Minsk were vandalized. On July 16, 2002, local authorities in Borisov detained a teenager on suspicion of participating in the Borisov cemetery desecration. Given the fact that non-Jewish headstones were also damaged during these attacks, there is no indication that these acts were specifically motivated by anti-Semitism.

During the reporting period, unknown persons vandalized several Holocaust memorials in several cities in Belarus: On May 26, the Yama Holocaust memorial com-

plex in Minsk; a Holocaust memorial in the town of Timkovichi; and a cemetery in Bobrusk; on August 18, 2002, a Holocaust memorial in Lida.

During the reporting period, unknown vandals destroyed crosses, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, that were erected at Kuropaty, an area used by the NKVD to murder over 300,000 people in the 1930s. The authorities made no attempts to find those responsible. In July 2002, Orthodox residents of the town of Ruba protested against the construction of a Pentecostal church.

According to the Anti-Defamation League and the World Jewish Congress, there are a number of small ultra-nationalist organizations on the fringes of society, and a number of newspapers regularly print anti-Semitic material. Anti-Semitic material from Russia also circulates widely.

The Jewish community is concerned by the concept of a "greater Slavic union" that is popular among nationalist organizations active in the country, including the Russian National Union (RNU), still active despite officially dissolving in 2000, and the National Bolshevik Party, another Russian extremist organization.

The official 2003 Belarusian Orthodox calendar, printed in Minsk, marks May 20 as the anniversary of the 1690 death of Gavriil Belostoksky, a young child who is alleged to have been murdered by Jews near Grodno. A May 20 prayer for Belostoksky makes reference to Jews as "real beasts" who allegedly kidnapped and murdered Belostoksky for religious purposes.

In January local Orthodox citizens in Stolin called for the Stolin District Council to remove Ivan Pashkevich from his position as a member of the lower house of the National Assembly. The petition claimed that Pashkevich had not fulfilled his promises to support the Belarusian Orthodox Church and accused him of "protecting neo-cults and sects." Pashkevich, a member of the Respublika opposition faction in the National Assembly and prominent figure in the Baptist community, has openly opposed the religion law and spoken out against government restriction of religious freedom.

In February unknown vandals spray-painted anti-Muslim graffiti in downtown Minsk. On July 5, 2002, unknown persons vandalized a Muslim cemetery in Slonim. On November 9, 2002, unknown assailants vandalized a mosque in Slonim.

On June 8, unknown individuals scrawled the word "antichrist" on the sign of the Living Faith Evangelical Church in Gomel. The Church was the target of similar attacks in August and November 2002. The Church reported that local authorities have been uncooperative in investigating these attacks.

On June 27, an unidentified car hit the vehicle of Alexander Sakovich, leader of the Union of Evangelical Faith Christians, and well-known opponent of the religion law, as he was driving in Minsk; Sakovich was unharmed. Shortly afterwards, Sakovich received a threatening call from an unknown person who warned him that next time he would not be so lucky.

There is no indication that the BOC has changed its view that it would cooperate only with religious faiths that have "historical roots" in the country. Members of most non-BOC faiths have expressed their opposition to the religion law and have openly criticized the law's restrictions and vagueness. On June 18, the Union of Evangelical Faith Christians announced that in protest to the law's passage, the group will not seek reregistration.

Prior to the passage of the law on religion, representatives of many religious faiths, including traditional and nontraditional, established the Civil Initiative for Religious Freedom. The group actively opposed the law on religion and other government restrictions on religious groups. In August 2002, the group published "The White Book," which detailed the Government's many abuses of religious freedom and information about the religion law.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy continues to promote and monitor religious freedom as part of frequent discussions on the poor human rights situation in the country. The US Embassy regularly coordinated its efforts to promote religious freedom with Western diplomatic missions in Minsk. Embassy staff maintained regular contact with representatives of religious groups and government officials responsible for religious affairs.

The Embassy has hosted several roundtables of religious leaders to discuss relevant issues pertaining to religious freedom and government harassment. In October and December 2002, visiting officials from the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development met with representatives of several religious groups to ascertain the religious freedom situation. The U.S. Embassy also assisted in making arrangements for delegations of foreign organizations concerned with reli-

religious freedom. Embassy staff also attended trials and demonstrations of those protesting against the Government's repressive policies on religious groups.

During the reporting period, the U.S. Government issued several press releases on religious freedom issues. On June 25, 2002, the U.S. Embassy expressed its concern with the draft law on religion and called upon the Government to take steps to ensure that all religious groups be allowed to worship freely. On November 1, 2002, the Department of State issued a public statement criticizing the passage of the law, citing the law's numerous restrictive elements. The U.S. delegation to the OSCE criticized the Government's poor religious freedom record in an October 2002 public statement. The U.S. Embassy released public statements condemning the passage of the law on religion and called upon the Government to ensure that all citizens have the right to worship freely. On May 31, the U.S. Embassy condemned the vandalizing of the Holocaust memorials and Jewish cemeteries in several cities.

Despite promises to discuss religious freedom concerns with the U.S. Embassy, the Government took steps either to avoid discussing these concerns or prevent Embassy staff from reporting on religious freedom issues. On October 7, 2002, the CRNA unexpectedly cancelled a meeting between CRNA officials and a visiting U.S. Government official and the Ambassador which had been scheduled well in advance. On October 9, 2002, three U.S. Embassy staff and a Department of State official, having stopped at the demolition site of the BAOC Church, were detained for four hours in the town of Pogranichny, allegedly for illegally entering the border zone. A local employee of the Embassy, who was accompanying the delegation who was scheduled to meet the mayor of Pogranichny to discuss U.S. Government concerns over the destruction of the BAOC Church, received an official warning for failing to provide personal identification to local authorities.

BELGIUM

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

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government continued to take action against groups that it considers "harmful sects."

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, several religious groups complained of discrimination, particularly groups that have not been accorded official "recognized" status by the Government and those associated primarily with immigrant communities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 12,566 square miles, and its population is approximately 10.3 million.

The population is predominantly Roman Catholic. According to the 2001 Survey and Study of Religion, jointly conducted by a number of the country's universities and based on self-identification, approximately 47 percent of the population identify themselves as belonging to the Catholic Church. The Muslim population numbers approximately 364,000, and there are an estimated 380 mosques in the country. Protestants number between 125,000 and 140,000. The Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches have approximately 70,000 adherents. The Jewish population is estimated at between 45,000 and 55,000. The Anglican Church has approximately 10,800 members. The largest nonrecognized religions are Jehovah's Witnesses, with approximately 27,000 baptized members, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), with approximately 3,000 members.

Estimates indicate that approximately 15 percent of the population do not identify with any religion. Approximately 7.4 percent of the population describe themselves as laic (members of nonconfessional philosophical organizations), and another 1.1 percent belong to organized laity.

According to a 1999 survey by an independent academic group, only 11.2 percent of the population attend weekly religious services. However, religion still plays a role in major life events—65 percent of the children born in the country are baptized; 49.2 percent of couples opt for a religious marriage; and 76.6 percent of funerals include religious services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Government accords "recognized" status to Roman Catholicism, Protestantism (including evangelicals), Judaism, Anglicanism, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity (Greek and Russian). These religions receive subsidies from government revenues. The Government also supports the freedom to participate in laic organizations. These secular humanist groups serve as a seventh recognized "religion," and their organizing body, the Central Council of Non-Religious Philosophical Communities of Belgium, receives funds and benefits similar to those of the six other recognized religions.

The Federal Government and Parliament have responsibility for recognizing faiths and paying the wages and pensions of ministers. As a result of constitutional reforms enacted by Parliament in 2001, religious teaching, accounting by religious groups, and religious buildings have become the jurisdiction of the regional governments. Laic organizations remain under the jurisdiction of the federal authorities.

By law each recognized religion has the right to provide teachers at government expense for religious instruction in schools. The Government also pays the salaries, retirement, and lodging costs of ministers and subsidizes the construction and renovation of religious buildings for recognized religions. The ecclesiastical administrations of recognized religions have legal rights and obligations, and the municipality in which they are located must pay any debts that they incur. Some subsidies are the responsibility of the Federal Government, while the regional and municipal governments pay others. According to an independent academic review, the Government at all levels spent \$523 million (approximately 23 billion Belgian francs) on subsidies for recognized religions in 2000. Of that amount, 79.2 percent went to the Catholic Church, 13 percent to laic organizations, 3.5 percent to Muslims, 3.2 percent to Protestants, 0.6 percent to Jews, 0.4 percent to Orthodox Christians, and 0.1 percent to Anglicans.

The Government applies the five criteria in deciding whether or not 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 the religion must abide by the laws of the State and respect public order. The five criteria are not listed in decrees or laws, and the Government does not formally define "sufficient," "long period of time," or "social value." A religious group seeking official recognition applies to the Ministry of Justice, which then conducts a thorough review before recommending approval or rejection. Final approval of recognized status is the sole responsibility of the Parliament; however, the Parliament generally accepts the decision of the Ministry of Justice. A group whose application is refused by the Ministry of Justice may appeal the decision to the Council of State.

The lack of recognized status does not prevent religious groups from practicing their faith freely and openly. Nonrecognized groups do not qualify for government subsidies; however, they may qualify for tax-exempt status as nonprofit organizations.

The Muslim Executive Council, the group recognized by the Government to represent the Islamic faith, received government funding during the period covered by this report, but mosques, imams, and Islamic schools and teachers did not. In June the Justice Ministry agreed on the composition of a new interim Muslim Executive Council, as well as a list of mosques, imams, and other Islamic institutions that would be eligible to receive government subsidies. Both issues remained under consideration by the Government at the end of the period covered by this report.

In 2003, the Justice Minister signed a Royal Decree on the partial renewal of the Muslim Executive Council. Elections for a new Muslim General Assembly, a wider representative body, are scheduled for 2004.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Government continued to take action against groups that it considers as "harmful sects."

A special Parliamentary Commission established to examine the potential dangers posed by sects issued a report in 1997 that divided sects into two broadly defined categories. The Commission defined the first category of "respectable" sects as "organized groups of individuals espousing the same doctrine with a religion," which reflect the normal exercise of freedom of religion and assembly provided for by fundamental rights. The Commission defined the second category, "harmful sectarian or-

ganizations,” as groups having or claiming to have a philosophical or religious purpose and whose organization or practice involves illegal or injurious activities, harm to individuals or society, or impairment of human dignity. The report included a list of 189 sectarian organizations, including the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Church of Scientology, and the Young Women’s Christian Association. Although the introduction to the list stated that there was no intent to characterize any of the groups as “dangerous,” the list quickly became known in the press and to the public as the “dangerous sects” list. The Parliament eventually adopted several of the report’s recommendations but never adopted the list itself.

Some religious groups included in the 1997 parliamentary list have continued to complain that their inclusion has resulted in discriminatory action against them. In July a report issued by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights asserted that the Government had not taken any effective measures to counteract the hostility and discrimination suffered by members of religious groups depicted as “sects.”

The 1997 parliamentary report led to the creation of a government-sponsored Center for Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations, which collects publicly available information on a wide range of religious and philosophical groups and provides information and advice to the public upon request regarding the legal rights of freedom of association, privacy, and freedom of religion. The Center’s library is open to the public and contains information on religion in general as well as on specific religious groups, including information provided by those groups. The Center has the authority to share with the public any information it collects on religious sects; however, it does not have the authority to provide assessments of individual sectarian organizations to the general public, and despite its name, the regulations prohibit it from categorizing any particular group as harmful.

An interagency coordination group designed to work in conjunction with the Center to coordinate government policy meets quarterly to exchange information on sect activities. The Government also has designated the Federal Prosecutor and 1 magistrate in each of the 27 judicial districts to monitor cases involving sects.

The 1997 parliamentary report also recommended that municipal governments sponsor information campaigns to educate the public, especially children, about the phenomenon of harmful sects. A 1998 law formally charges the country’s State Security with the duty of monitoring harmful sectarian organizations as potential threats to the internal security of the country. A subgroup of law enforcement officials meets bi-monthly to exchange information on sect activities. Most law enforcement agencies have an official specifically assigned to handle sect issues.

In June a Prosecutor froze approximately \$375,000 (326,000 euros) in a Church of Scientology bank account on suspicion of money laundering. The Prosecutor has directed a criminal investigation into the Church of Scientology’s operations since 1999 on suspicion of fraud and privacy violations and criminal association. The Chamber of Indictment (a judicial panel that rules on the admissibility of charges formulated during a criminal investigation) returned the Church of Scientology file to the investigating judge and cleared the way for the case to proceed. The investigating judge indicated that the investigation was nearly complete, and the case could go to trial in 2004.

In February 2002, police detained five American volunteer workers at an Assemblies of God school and media center for working without employment permits; four were deported shortly thereafter. Assemblies of God teachers for years had obtained missionary visas, which do not require work permits. The Government now says that the teachers do not qualify for that status and must have work permits but have not identified a permit for which volunteer workers could apply. The Assemblies of God leaders closed the school in the wake of the deportations. At the end of the period covered by this report, the school remained closed, and Assemblies of God officials had still not been able to find an acceptable way for foreign volunteers to teach at the school.

The Church of Latter-day Saints continues to work to resolve the problem of obtaining visas for its missionaries. The Government had suspended visa issuance to Mormon missionaries for several months in 2000 and again beginning in November 2001. Mormon missionaries, who work as unpaid volunteers, do not qualify to obtain the work permits necessary to obtain visas under the Foreign Worker’s Act of 1999, nor do they qualify for missionary visas due to the unrecognized status of the Church of Latter-day Saints. In June 2002, through the efforts of church officials and the U.S. Embassy, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to exempt volunteer Mormon missionaries from the certificate requirement and to process all 85 pending visa applications. In March Mormon Church representatives appealed to the Government to formalize the agreement in writing. At

the end of the period covered by this report, no written agreement had been obtained.

Some courts in the Flanders region have stipulated, in the context of child custody proceedings and as a condition of granting visitation rights, that a noncustodial parent who is a member of Jehovah's Witnesses may not expose his or her children to the teachings or lifestyle of that religious group during visits. These courts have claimed that such exposure would be harmful to the child; however, other courts have not imposed this restriction.

In 2002 the Advisory Bio-Ethical Committee criticized the practice of requiring that a physician respect the decision of an adult Jehovah's Witness to refuse a life-saving blood transfusion.

The Government permits religious instruction in public schools; however, students are not required to attend religion classes. Public school religion teachers are nominated by a committee from their religious group and appointed by the Minister of Education. All public schools offer a teacher for each of the six recognized religions. A seventh choice, a nonconfessional course, is available if the child does not wish a religious course. Private Catholic schools receive government subsidies for working expenses and teacher salaries. A few Catholic schools teach the Islamic faith, and the issue of whether Catholic schools should be obligated to offer religious teaching for other faiths was being discussed in the community and regional parliaments.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, several religious groups complain of discrimination, particularly groups that have not been accorded official "recognized" status by the Government and those associated primarily with immigrant communities.

According to the country's Anti-Racism Center, complaints of anti-Semitic incidents continued to rise in 2003. In June the synagogue in Charleroi again was targeted—this time in a failed car bombing. Government officials continued to criticize strongly attacks on the Jewish community and maintained increased security around synagogues and Jewish community buildings.

The Center for Equal Opportunity and the Fight Against Racism, an independent government agency, reports that 7.5 percent of the discrimination complaints filed with the Center during 2002 cited religion as the basis of the alleged discrimination.

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 dialog and promote tolerance among all religious groups. At the local level, every Catholic diocese has established commissions for interfaith dialog.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

U.S. Embassy representatives discussed the issue of religious freedom with officials from the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, and Interior, as well as with Members of Parliament. Embassy officials also expressed concern regarding anti-Semitic incidents. There is an ongoing dialog between the Embassy and the Ministry of Justice at the cabinet level regarding the implementation of recommendations of the 1997 parliamentary report on sectarian organizations. Embassy officials also meet regularly with officials of the Government's interagency coordination group who monitor sect activities and coordinate government policy on this issue. Embassy officials continued to monitor the Government's progress toward implementing a permanent solution to the Mormon visa problem and the issuance of work permits for volunteer religious workers.

Embassy officials met with representatives of both recognized and nonrecognized religions that reported some form of discrimination during the period covered by this report.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The State Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entity constitutions of the State's two constituent entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, provide for freedom of religion, and individuals generally enjoy this right in ethnically mixed areas or in areas where they are adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of minority religions in non-ethnically mixed areas have had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. After a significant increase in 2001–2002 in the number of refugees returning to areas in which they constituted a religious minority, the number of returns sharply declined during the first 5 months of 2003. This decline likely resulted from a combination of factors, including the success of nationalist parties in the October 2002 elections, poor economic conditions, an increase in return-related violence, deaths and injuries caused by landmines, and frustration over problems with property restitution.

Religious intolerance in the country directly reflects ethnic intolerance because of the virtually indistinguishable identification of ethnicity with one's religious background. Ethnic Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks) generally are associated with Islam, ethnic Croats with the Roman Catholic Church, and ethnic Serbs with the Serbian Orthodox Church. Despite the constitutional provisions protecting religious freedom, some discrimination against religious minorities occurs in virtually all parts of the country. In some communities, local religious leaders contributed to intolerance and an increase in nationalist feeling through public statements and on occasion in sermons. Following the October 2002 elections, which returned nationalist political parties to power, the number and severity of violent incidents directed against refugee returns have increased sharply.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from all three major religious communities in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

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 comprising Brcko. The country has a total area of 19,781 square miles, and its population is estimated to be between 3.4 and 4.4 million. In 2001 the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that the population was 3.8 million. Reliable statistics on the precise membership of different religious groups remained unavailable.

Ethnic groups identify very closely with distinct religions or religious/cultural traditions, including the predominantly Muslim Bosniaks, the predominantly Roman Catholic Croats, and the predominantly Serbian Orthodox Serbs. According to the U.N. Development Program's Human Development Report 2002, Muslims constitute 40 percent of the population, Serbian Orthodox 31 percent, Roman Catholics 15 percent, Protestants 4 percent, and other groups 10 percent.

The rate of religious observance remains low among all religious groups; however, religious leaders claim that observance is increasing among the young as an expression of increased identification with their ethnic heritage. While the rate of religious observance generally has remained moderate among members of the three major ethnic groups, some areas of significantly greater observance do exist, such as among Roman Catholic Croats in the Herzegovina region.

Ethnic cleansing during the 1992–1995 war caused internal migration, which almost completely segregated the population into separate ethno-religious areas. Increased levels of returns in 2001–2002 slowed markedly in 2003, leaving the majority of Serbian Orthodox adherents still living in the RS and the majority of Muslims and Catholics still living in the Federation. Within the Federation, distinct Muslim and Catholic majority areas remain. Returns of Serbian Orthodox adherents and Muslims to their prewar homes in Western Bosnia Canton and Muslims to their prewar homes in eastern Bosnia near Srebrenica have shifted notably the ethno-religious composition in both areas.

Missionary activity is limited but growing and includes a small number of representatives from the following organizations, some of which have their central offices for the region in Zagreb or another European city outside of the country: Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Methodist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Krishna Consciousness.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The State Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and individuals generally enjoyed this right in ethnically mixed areas or in areas where they were adherents of the majority religion; however, adherents of minority religions in non-ethnically mixed areas had their right to worship restricted, sometimes violently.

The State Constitution attempts to safeguard the rights of the three major ethnic groups by providing for each group's proportional representation in the State Government and the military; for example, the country has a three-member joint Presidency composed of one representative from each of the three major ethnic groups, with a chairmanship that rotates every 8 months. Prior to 2003, the State Council of Ministers had six ministries, with each ethnic group holding two ministries and a deputy ministry position in each of the other four ministries. The chairmanship of the Council of Ministers rotated every 8 months with a Bosniak, a Croat, and a Serb minister assuming the chairmanship in turn. Since 2003 the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers ceased to rotate, and each ministry has only one deputy.

After the October 2002 elections, the coalition ruling parties reached an internal agreement on how to distribute ministries and deputy ministries among the governing parties (which are divided along ethnic lines) and how to select the Chairman of Council of Ministers (COM). The strongest political party in the coalition is the Bosniak Party for Democratic Action (SDA) (Bosniak) which holds the Chairmanship of the COM. Serb, Croat, and Bosniak political parties hold other positions. The entity governments also employ systems of proportional representation. In the RS in 2003, Serbs led eight ministries, Bosniaks led five, and Croats led three, while in the Federation, Bosniaks led eight ministries, Croats led five, and Serbs led three. Due to the intrinsic identification of the major ethnic groups with distinct religions or religious/cultural traditions, this principal of ethnic parity in effect has reserved certain positions in Government and the military for adherents or sympathizers of certain faiths.

Political parties dominated by a single ethnic group remain powerful in the country. Most political parties continue to identify closely with the religion associated with their predominant ethnic group; however, many political parties claim to be multiethnic. Some clerics have characterized hard-line nationalist political sympathies as part of "true" religious practice. Many political party leaders are former Communists who have adopted the characteristics of their particular ethnic group, including religion, to strengthen their credibility with voters.

Nationalists lost power in the Federation and State Governments as a result of the November 2000 general elections but returned to power after the October 2002 elections. Candidates of the three main nationalist parties, the SDA, the Serb Democratic Party (SDS), and the Croat Democratic Union (HDZ), won seats to the tripartite joint Presidency. The SDS, founded by wartime Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, won a plurality of votes in the RS elections but lost ground to the moderate Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). Following the October elections, coalitions of nationalist parties from all three ethnic groups gained control in the State Parliamentary Assembly, as well as the Federation and RS Parliaments. Several swing parties that previously had supported the moderate Alliance For Change (AFC) government, including the RS-based Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) and the Bosniak Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH), joined with the nationalist parties, giving the nationalist coalitions the numbers they needed to gain control.

While the majority of the population of the Federation consists of Bosniaks and Croats, neither Islam nor Roman Catholicism enjoys special status under the Federation Constitution. In 2000 the State Constitutional Court struck down a provision in the RS Constitution directing the RS Government to "support materially the Serbian Orthodox Church and cooperate with it in all fields." In 2002 the RS gave approximately \$233,962 (500,000 KM) in assistance to the Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Islamic faiths. In 2003 the RS Government planned to spend approximately \$330,980 (600,000 KM) on assistance to religious groups, principally to reconstruct religious buildings.

No legislation governs religion or the licensing of religious groups. As a result, minority religions seeking entry into the country generally apply for legal recognition as cultural or humanitarian organizations. Foreign religious workers normally enter the country with tourist visas, which allow for stays as long as 3 months. Some apparently enter and reenter the country every 3 months, essentially extending their tourist status indefinitely. The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain a temporary residence permit from a Cantonal Ministry of Interior before their 3-month tourist visas expire. At that point, they must submit documentation substan-

tiating the nature and status of their religious group/organization and its work plan for the country. If the organization can readily demonstrate its status as a non-profit organization engaged in voluntary, humanitarian activities, the Ministry normally will approve the application. There were no reports of authorities refusing to approve missionaries' applications for temporary residence permits. The Federation Government reported that some missionaries chose first to apply for a work permit with the Federation Institute of Employment. If authorities issued a work permit, they generally granted temporary residence for the same length of time as the work permit.

The canton and entity governments and the Brcko District authorities have responsibility for education; there is no national education ministry or policy. Public schools offer religious education classes, but with the exception of Brcko, schools generally offer religious instruction only in the area's majority religion. In theory, students have the option not to attend; however, in practice students of the majority religion face pressure from teachers and peers to attend the classes. The Government does not recognize home schooling as an alternative to obligatory public education.

The RS requires Serbs to attend religion classes but does not require attendance for Bosniaks and Croats. If more than 20 Bosniaks or Croats attend a particular school, the school will organize classes for their religions. In the five cantons with Bosniak majorities, schools offer Islamic religious instruction as a 2-hour per week elective course. Many schools in the predominantly Muslim Sarajevo Canton schedule religious instruction in the middle of the day, forcing students who do not attend the classes to wait or sit in the hall. Other cantons and Brcko District offer religious instruction at the end of the day, allowing students who do not attend the classes to go home early. In Sarajevo, Tuzla, Travnik, and Zenica/Vares, Croat students may attend Catholic school centers. In cantons with Croat majorities, all Croat students attend the "elective" 1-hour weekly Catholic religion course for primary and middle schools.

After the Office of the High Representative (OHR) endorsed a declaration signed by the Federation and RS Ministers of Education calling for the introduction of countrywide courses on "Democracy and Human Rights" and the "Culture of Religion," the democracy course has been completed and implemented as part of the official school curriculum in all Federation cantons, the RS, and Brcko. The comparative religion course, "Culture of Religion," is still under discussion, and had not been introduced at the end of the period covered by this report.

The State Government does not officially recognize any religious holidays. Entity and cantonal authorities routinely recognize religious holidays celebrated by members of the area's majority religion, with government and public offices closed on those days.

The leaders of the Muslim, Roman Catholic, Serbian Orthodox, and Jewish communities have prepared a draft law that would define the legal status of religious organizations, including property rights. The State Council of Ministers has adopted the draft law and forwarded it to the Parliament for consideration. The World Conference on Religion and Peace, an NGO that assisted in drafting the law, expected the Parliament to take action on the measure in September or October. If adopted the law would grant religious organizations a right to property restitution "in accordance with the law"; however, no such restitution law exists. The four religious communities responsible for the draft law all have extensive claims for restitution of property that the Government of the former Yugoslavia nationalized after World War II and did not return. Some international observers believe that a legal framework governing property restitution that accords equal status to all religious communities would decrease dependence on the political process for religious leaders seeking property restitution on behalf of their communities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The weak administrative and judicial systems effectively restrict religious freedom and pose major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. In some cases, the RS Government, local governments, and police forces made some improvements in protecting religious freedoms, although problems remained, including an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom may occur.

Deputies being sworn into the RS National Assembly may choose either a religious oath consistent with their religious tradition or a nonreligious civil oath. Deputies to the State and Federation Parliaments take nonreligious civil oaths.

The State Constitution provides for proportional representation for each of the three major ethnic groups in the Government and the military. Because of the close identification of ethnicity with religious background, this principal of ethnic parity in effect reserves certain positions in Government and the military for adherents or

sympathizers of certain faiths. The military in the RS is staffed overwhelmingly by ethnic Serbs and only has Serbian Orthodox chaplains. The Federation military is composed of separate Bosniak and Croat units, as well as integrated units, and has both Muslim and Catholic chaplains.

In previous years, RS authorities frequently did not intervene to prevent the violent obstruction of efforts to rebuild some of the 618 mosques and 129 churches in the RS that were destroyed or significantly damaged during the 1992–1995 war. Local police also subsequently failed to conduct a serious investigation into several of the incidents. The RS Government has mediated a number of disputes between religious communities and local governments, resulting in the issuance of permits in virtually all of the outstanding reconstruction cases from 2001–2002, including permits for all five mosques being reconstructed in Bijeljina, for mosques in Trebinje, and for other disputed cases. The mosque in Dobož reopened following a bombing incident in December 2002, and in Zvornik the Islamic community and the city continued negotiations over an alternative mosque site.

The Human Rights Chamber, established under the Dayton Agreement, issues rulings that at times affect religious freedom, particularly regarding religious properties. The Chamber considers alleged violations of the European Convention on Human Rights if the violation falls within the responsibility of one of the parties to the Dayton Agreement and occurred after its signing; parties cannot appeal the Chamber's decisions to the State Constitutional Court. In June the Human Rights Chamber found Travnik municipality in the Federation to be in violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The municipality had returned property to the Islamic community but not to the Roman Catholic community. The Chamber ordered the Federation to expedite relocations of public schools housed in the Roman Catholic school building in Travnik so that remaining portions of the building could be returned to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese.

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. Many officials use property restitution cases as a tool of political patronage, rendering religious leaders dependent on politicians to regain property taken from religious communities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The RS Government, local governments, and police forces frequently allowed or encouraged an atmosphere in which abuses of religious freedom could take place, although there was some improvement from previous years. The absence of a police force willing to protect religious minorities and a judicial system willing to prosecute crimes against them posed major obstacles to safeguarding the rights of religious minorities. While new officers continue to be accepted into the police academies under strictly observed ethnic quotas, the goal of establishing effective, professional, multiethnic police forces throughout the country will take years of concentrated effort. Administrative and financial obstacles to rebuilding religious structures impeded the ability of religious minorities to worship freely and delayed the return of minority refugees in many areas.

Thirteen Croats who in December 2001 had attacked the site of a mosque being reconstructed in Stolac received fines of \$113 (250 KM) per person for disturbing the public order, a petty offense. Two Bosniaks who had attempted to defend the mosque site received fines of \$91 (200 KM) each for the same violation. Reconstruction of the Stolac mosque continued without further problems and should reach completion by the end of 2003.

In October 2002, after many delays, 14 persons received sentences of 2 to 13 months in prison for their role in a violent demonstration by Serb nationalists in May 2001 that disrupted a cornerstone laying ceremony on the site of the destroyed Ferhadija Central Mosque in Banja Luka. The demonstration had resulted in injuries to approximately 30 individuals, as well as the destruction of Bosniak-owned businesses and other property.

A significant number of citizens remained internally displaced or as refugees abroad following the 1992–1995 war. Virtually all had fled areas where their ethno-religious community had been in the minority or had ended up in the minority as a result of the war. Although organized and spontaneous returns significantly increased in 2001–2002, they began to fall sharply in 2003.

A variety of incidents directed at religious targets in all three ethnic majority areas were reported throughout 2002 and the first half of 2003. In March a booby-trapped hand grenade killed a Muslim and seriously injured his son as they tried to repair an apartment in the Croat-controlled part of the ethnically divided town of Mostar. The apartment belonged to someone other than the two victims, making the intended target of the attack unclear.

In June the offices of the Travnik Islamic community were destroyed, although nothing was stolen during the incident.

In January local police arrested two suspects for breaking the windows in the houses of two Bosniak returnees in Srebrenica.

Incidents directed at Bosniak Muslims during the last months of 2002 included: The December 19 bombing of the house of a Bosniak returnee near Bijeljina, the December 23 desecration of two Muslim tombstones in a graveyard in Prijedor, the December bombings in Doboј of a mosque and two houses belonging to Bosniaks, and a November bomb attack against a mosque in Prijedor.

In September 2002, a powerful explosion completely destroyed the minaret and damaged the roof and windows of a newly reconstructed mosque in Gacko, only 3 months after the inauguration of the mosque in June 2002. During the same month, police arrested two Serbs for breaking the windows of a mosque in Doboј.

There were also incidents directed at Bosnian Croats during the last months of 2002. In December 2002, vandals in Mostar burned the municipal creche; police arrested several suspects in connection with the incident. Later that month, Muamer Topalovic, a Bosniak, attacked a Croat family that had recently returned to Konjic, killing three and severely injuring another. Topalovic, who apparently had carried out the attack for religious reasons, was sentenced to 35 years in prison.

A Croat family in Mostar received a threatening, racist letter with slogans praising Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and al-Qa'ida, attached to a hand grenade. Unknown culprits stoned the reading room and headquarters of the Croat humanitarian-cultural association "Danica" in Banja Luka. In November 2002, vandals sprayed the walls of Saint Joseph's Catholic Church in Drvar with insulting graffiti.

Roman Catholic Church authorities in Sarajevo reported vandalism to cars belonging to church workers and other church property, the overturning of gravestones in Catholic cemeteries, and church entrances stained by urine. In April 2002, stone throwers attacked St. Anthony Church in Sarajevo during Easter week services.

There were incidents directed against members of the Bosnian Serb Orthodox community during the period covered by this report. Federation police arrested three suspects for attacking a Serb returnee family in Lukavac. In May the Orthodox Church of St. Peter and Paul in Kozarac repeatedly was stoned; police arrested four minors in connection with the incident, and the investigation continued at the end of the period covered by this report.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In June Pope John Paul II made an official visit to the predominantly Serb Orthodox city of Banja Luka in the RS. Approximately 50,000 pilgrims and dignitaries attended an outdoor mass at the Petricevac monastery. RS police and some Federation police units, working with the NATO-led Stabilization Force, succeeded in deterring security incidents on the day of the visit. No nationalist demonstrations or altercations took place. The country's Croat leadership generally praised the organization and handling of the visit, although Banja Luka Bishop Franjo Komarica commented during the visit that "the Catholic Church in the Banja Luka region faces extinction" because of the low rate of Croat returns. The top three RS leaders—RS President Dragan Cavic (SDS), RS Prime Minister Dragan Mikerevic (PDP), and RS National Assembly Speaker Dragan Kalinic (SDS)—issued a joint statement criticizing Bishop Komarica's speech and denying that the RS Government had obstructed Croat returns. Orthodox Patriarch Pavle did not travel from Belgrade to meet the Pope, and local Orthodox bishops and the Metropolitan (the head of the Bosnian Serb Orthodox Church) did not attend the mass at the Petricevac monastery but did meet with the Pope privately.

Relations among religious communities in the Croat-dominated Stolac municipality in the Federation improved significantly over the past year. There have been no recent incidents of violence against returnees or attempts to obstruct the reconstruction of the municipality's historic Careva Mosque, which is nearly completed. Some tensions remain between the Catholic and Muslim religious communities.

In April Foca Mayor Nedeljko Pavlovic and Gorazde Mufti Hamed Efendic agreed on the construction of a Muslim religious facility in Foca, a notoriously hard-line Serb municipality in the RS.

In December 2002, the Serb-dominated Bijeljina Municipal Department for Urban Planning issued construction licenses for the reconstruction of all five mosques in

Bijeljina, which had been mined and largely destroyed in 1993. A new mosque was constructed in Kupres. The reconstruction of three destroyed mosques finally began in Croat-dominated west Mostar. Finances, more so than religious discrimination, hampered further work on mosques in the Mostar area.

In June a foundation stone was laid for the reconstruction of Esmā Sultana's mosque in Jajce. The mosque, originally constructed 340 years ago, had been destroyed in 1993. Also in June reconstruction began for the Osman-Pasha mosque in Trebinje, demolished at the beginning of 1993. In March reconstruction commenced for the Hadji-Omer mosque in Banja Luka, which was deliberately destroyed by fire in 1993. In December 2002, a new mosque was constructed in Livno on the foundations of an older mosque destroyed in 1993.

In September 2002, the first phase of repairs to a Roman Catholic church destroyed in 1992 in Teslic reached completion. One piece of Roman Catholic Church property was returned in Banja Luka.

The situation of religious minorities improved somewhat in Prijedor, a notably hard-line Serb municipality in the RS. In May 2002, five former police officers from Prijedor were detained for their suspected involvement in the 1995 murders of Catholic priest Tomislav Matanovic and his parents. In November 2002 after 2 years of delay, Prijedor city authorities approved a zoning plan permitting the construction of the city mosque; the city's several mosques had been destroyed during the war. Reconstruction of a Catholic church in Prijedor neared completion at the end of the period covered by this report. In Bosniak-dominated Bradina, Konjic municipality, the Islamic community agreed to remove a mosque that had been constructed on someone else's land.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Until the 19th century, most of the country's residents identified themselves by religious affiliation. With the rise of Balkan nationalism in the 19th century, the country came to identify itself in ethnic, as well as religious terms. This tendency increased during the Communist era when the regime discouraged religious affiliation. Under the Communists, most of the country's population identified themselves by ethnic group or simply as "Yugoslavs." Only with the adoption of the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution could Muslims identify themselves as such in the census. Since the country's independence, there have continued to be persons who decline to accept either ethnic or religious identification and consider themselves simply as Bosnians.

The 1992–1995 war was not a religious conflict as such. However, the association of ethnicity and religion is so close that the bitterness engendered by the war and the approximately 270,000 deaths it caused has contributed to mutual suspicion among members of all three major religious groups.

Despite the constitutional provisions for religious freedom, some discrimination against religious minorities occurs in virtually all parts of the country. Discrimination is significantly worse in the RS, particularly in the eastern RS, and it remains a serious problem in Croat-dominated areas of the Federation; discrimination appears to also have become worse in Bosniak-majority areas.

Religious buildings, clerics, and individual believers in any area where they constitute a religious minority bear the brunt of retaliation for discrimination and violence perpetrated by other members of their religious/ethnic groups in areas where those groups constitute the majority. Because they are powerful symbols of religious identification and ethnicity, clerics and religious buildings are favored targets. Most religious leaders severely criticize violence and nationalism against their own group but can be less vocal in condemning acts against members of other groups.

While Sarajevo, the Bosniak-majority capital of the country, has preserved in part its traditional role as a multiethnic city, complaints of discrimination increased during the period covered by this report. There were reports of verbal attacks directed against nuns driving through Sarajevo and increased vandalism of cemeteries. Numerous buildings belonging to the Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, and Roman Catholic communities were damaged or destroyed during the 1992–1995 war, usually in a deliberate attempt at ethnic intimidation. The religious buildings destroyed during the war included 618 mosques and 129 churches in RS territory. RS authorities frequently did not intervene to prevent the violent obstruction of efforts to rebuild many of the mosques and churches.

After violent efforts to obstruct the reconstruction of Osman Pasha Mosque in Trebinje, the rebuilding process finally commenced in June. Reconstruction of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka had not begun by the end of the period covered by this report, although the Islamic community has all the necessary permits and was collecting money for its construction.

At the end of the period covered by this report, no progress had been made in solving the May 2001 grenade attack against the Serb Orthodox Church in the Bosniak-dominated town of Sanski Most; the May 2001 stoning of Serb-inhabited houses in Sarajevo, Bociinja, and Glamoc; or the May 2001 desecration of 11 tombstones in an Orthodox cemetery in Tuzla.

Leaders of the Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish communities have committed themselves publicly to building a durable peace and national reconciliation. The leaders of these four communities participate in the Interreligious Affairs Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which operates with the active involvement of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, a U.S.-based NGO. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and OHR facilitate interfaith meetings at the local level as well.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and leaders from all three major religious communities in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government supports the return of refugees, democratization, and protection of human rights throughout the country. The U.S. Government also encourages leaders from all major religious communities to promote a multiethnic society that is conducive to religious freedom. Strong U.S. Government support for full implementation of the Dayton Accords and a politically moderate, multiethnic Government is intended, over time, to improve respect for religious freedom in the country.

The U.S. Government provides financial support to the Human Rights Chamber, which hears cases on religious discrimination. Since the mandate of the Human Rights Chamber will end on December 31, 2003, the U.S. Government is encouraging the State Constitutional Court to assume human rights cases, including those involving religious freedoms, to promote high-level national attention to such cases. The Ambassador frequently meets with the principal religious leaders, individually and collectively, to urge them to work toward moderation and multiethnicity. The Ambassador has been involved actively as a member of the Srebrenica Foundation for the Memorial and Cemetery dedicated to victims of the 1995 massacre of Muslims in Potocari. International and U.S. Government involvement in this issue has resulted in unprecedented reconciliation. In addition, the Embassy publicly severely criticizes instances of religious discrimination and attacks against religious communities or buildings and encourages leaders from all ethnic groups and members of the international community to oppose publicly such attacks. The U.S. Agency for International Development provides funding to train lawyers and judges on human rights, including religious freedom.

BULGARIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in practice for some non-Orthodox religious groups. These restrictions are manifested primarily in a registration process that is selective, slow, and nontransparent. The Government prohibits the public practice of religion by groups that are not registered.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. In December 2002, the Government passed a new law on religion—the Confessions Act. While an improvement over the previous law from 1949, religious and human rights groups have criticized the new law for the preferential treatment given to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and for provisions that appear to take sides in what many see as an internal Church conflict.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance of non-traditional religious minorities remained an intermittent problem. No major incidents were reported during the period covered by this report, and attitudes towards non-traditional groups continued to improve. Tensions between factions within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and concerns about Islamic fundamentalism continued to receive media coverage.

The U.S. Government raised the issue of religious freedom repeatedly in contacts with government officials and Members of Parliament in the context of its overall dialog of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 42,855 square miles, and its population is approximately 7.9 million according to a 2001 census. According to the most recent statistics from the country's National Statistical Institute, approximately 82.6 percent of citizens are Orthodox Christians and approximately 12.2 percent are Muslims, while the remainder includes Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Gregorian-Armenian Christians, Uniate Catholics, and others. Another study used 1998 figures to estimate that 85 percent of the population are Orthodox Christians, 13 percent are Muslims, 1.5 percent are Roman Catholics, 0.8 percent are Jews, and 1 percent are from other religions. A total of 36 denominations are registered officially with the Government, up from 30 in 2002. According to the head of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Religion, a number of denominations still have pending registration requests with the Sofia Court.

Some religious minorities are concentrated geographically. The Rhodope Mountains (along the country's southern border with Greece) are home to many Muslims, including ethnic Turks, Roma, and "Pomaks" (descendents of Slavic Bulgarians who converted to Islam centuries ago under Ottoman rule). At the western extreme of the Rhodopes, there are greater numbers of Pomaks, and on the eastern end, more ethnic Turks. Muslim ethnic Turks and Roma also live in large numbers in the northeast of the country, primarily in and around the cities of Shumen and Razgrad, as well as along the Black Sea coast. There are comparatively large numbers of Roman Catholics in Plovdiv, Assenovgrad, and in cities along the Danube River. Eastern Rite Catholic communities are located in Sofia and Smolyan. Many members of the country's small Jewish community live in Sofia, Ruse, and along the Black Sea coast. However, Protestant groups are dispersed more widely throughout the country. While clear statistics are not available, evangelical Protestant church groups have had particular success in attracting numerous converts from among the ethnic Roma minority, and these churches tend to be the most active denominations in predominantly Roma inhabited areas.

Although no exact data are available on attendance levels, most observers agree that evangelical Protestants tend to participate in religious services more frequently than other religious groups. Members of the country's Catholic community also are regarded as more likely than members of other faiths to regularly attend religious services.

Missionaries are present in the country, including, for example, representatives of evangelical Protestant churches and more than 100 missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the Government restricts this right in practice for some non-Orthodox religious groups.

The Constitution designates Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the "traditional" religion. The Government provides financial support for the Eastern Orthodox Church, as well as for several other religious communities perceived as holding historic places in society, such as the Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Jewish faiths, which also are considered "traditional." These groups generally benefit from a relatively high degree of governmental and societal tolerance.

A new law on religion, known as the Confessions Act, was approved by Parliament on December 22, 2002. It entered into force 1 week later, replacing an outdated religion law dating back to 1949. Religious and human rights groups have strongly criticized the law for the preferential treatment given to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and for provisions that appear to take sides in what many see as an internal Church conflict. Under the new law, all religious groups, with the exception of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, must register with the Sofia Municipal Court before they can practice their beliefs in public. The rather broad influence given to the Religious Denominations Directorate of the Council of Ministers, particularly regarding the Directorate's exclusive right to give "expert opinions" to the Court regarding registration matters, also has been a cause of concern.

Several drafts of the new law were under consideration in late 2002. The Act was adopted before international legal experts and human rights groups had the opportunity to review the final draft to ensure it was consistent with international standards on religious freedom. Upon review following adoption of the law, legal experts and human rights groups found some provisions in the law to be ambiguous or even contradictory. A review prepared in early 2003 for the Council of Europe highlights that the provisions dealing with the process of registration neither specify the cri-

teria establishing the basis on which the Court should grant registration, nor the grounds on which such registration can be withheld. The Act also fails to specify the consequences of failure to register as a religious community or outline any recourse if a competent court refuses to grant registration. Therefore, the actual impact of the new law will depend to a great extent on how the Act is implemented, including the Sofia Municipal Court's practices regarding registration. There are reports that some groups have encountered undue delays with their re-registration. Since visas are contingent on re-registration, the Missionary Sisters of Charity and the Salesians reportedly have been denied visas.

For most registered religious groups there were no restrictions on attendance at religious services or on private religious instruction. Four Islamic schools (including a university-level Muslim divinity school), a Muslim cultural center, a multi-denominational Protestant seminary, university theological faculties, and religious primary schools operated freely. Bibles and other religious materials in the Bulgarian language were imported or printed freely, and Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish publications were published regularly.

Optional religious education courses are offered in state-run schools. Following the successful introduction of a program to provide optional Islamic education classes in primary schools in 2002 using a textbook proposed by the Chief Mufti and approved by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry agreed to assist with funding for such courses in 2004. The Chief Mufti's office reports that in 2002 it funded more than 1,000 students participation in the pilot program. The Ministry announced that approximately 18,000 primary and secondary school students attend religion classes. Evangelical groups have expressed concern that other textbooks designed to be used in public schools for religious education are biased in favor of the Orthodox perspective.

The Government generally has encouraged greater religious tolerance since 1998 by seeking to promote greater understanding among different faiths.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government restricted religious freedom through a registration process that is selective, slow, and nontransparent. The Government prohibits the public practice of religion by groups that are not registered.

The split within the Bulgarian Orthodox Church between those who support Patriarch Maksim and those who view him as illegitimate because he was selected in 1971 under Communist rule to head that church led to tension between the groups and violence in July 2002. The schism, which began in 1992, continued despite attempts by the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha Government to heal the rift. While many Bulgarians viewed the Government as generally favoring the group headed by Maksim, the Government had stayed formally neutral regarding the leadership status of either Maksim's "Holy Synod" or the so-called "alternative synod." However, the new law recognizes Patriarch Maksim as the sole representative of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. It furthermore prohibits any group or person who has broken off from a registered religious group from using the same name or claiming any properties belonging to that group. Effectively, this prohibits members of the alternative synod from formally registering as the Bulgarian Orthodox Church or from claiming any of the Church property currently under its control.

On July 22, 2002, Stefan Kamberov, a 66-year-old priest associated with the alternative synod, was murdered near the St. Panteleimon Monastery near Dobrinshite. The two synods were in open conflict regarding the control of the monastery. Two suspects with connections to Maxim's synod (including one priest) have been arrested in connection with the murder, but the case has not yet been brought to trial.

While the observance of religious freedom has improved for some nontraditional groups, other groups have faced official disfavor and been disadvantaged by the Government's persistent refusal to grant registration. The legal requirement that groups whose activities have a religious element must register with the Sofia Municipal Court remained an obstacle to the activity of some religious groups, such as the Unification Church and the Sofia Church of Christ. Other church groups have successfully registered through the Court, but continued to face some discrimination and antipathy from many local governments.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are legally registered, and have been recognized since 1998; however, there have been problems between the Jehovah's Witnesses and some local authorities. The Jehovah's Witnesses have had a difficult time in Burgas, a city on the Black Sea. The locally elected municipal authorities, responding to public demonstrations against a Jehovah's Witnesses prayer house being built so close to a public school, used their "public order" powers to stop construction of the prayer house. The case is pending before a court and being appealed to regional authorities. Also Article 21 of the new Confessions Act, which requires religious orga-

nizations to register at the national and then the local level, is viewed as likely to exacerbate such problems since certain localities like Burgas have been consistently hostile to non-traditional groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In some cases, local authorities used the lack of registration as a pretext for interference with some groups and harassed others. Some church groups circumvented the administrative obstacles created by a lack of registration by registering as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Technically it remained illegal for a church to conduct any religious activities through its NGO-registered organization, although the Government sometimes tacitly allowed such groups to conduct worship as long as they kept a very low profile. There were periodic reports of police using lack of local or national registration as a pretext to confiscate signboards and materials, detain or expel religious workers, and deny visas or residence permits to foreign-national missionaries.

The national Government on some occasions, but not systematically, has stopped local governments from enforcing restrictive municipal government decisions, which appear to fall into a gray area of the law. Burgas, Plovdiv, and Stara Zagora are among the municipalities that have reported the greatest number of complaints of harassment of non-traditional religious groups. Some observers note with concern a tendency by certain municipalities to enact regulations preemptively that may be used to limit religious freedom if a perceived need arises.

These restrictive actions appear to be motivated by public intolerance. In November 2001, the city of Kurdzhali refused to issue the Christian Unity Biblical Association a permit for a planned public gathering. A spokesperson for the municipality reportedly justified this decision by stating that the evangelical association preached ideas that were "alien to local people." In June the Municipal Council in Burgas passed a decision banning Jehovah's Witnesses from building a prayer hall near a local public school. According to the Chairman of the Council, local residents and the school community protested the construction of the building. The Council's decision was based on regulations granting it the authority to protect "public order and security." Central government authorities have made no attempt to appeal the Council's decision.

Although several municipalities such as Burgas, Plovdiv, Pleven, Gorna Oryahovitsa, and Stara Zagora previously had passed local ordinances that curtailed religious practices, often in contravention of the Constitution and international law, it does not appear that these have been strictly enforced. There were no reported incidents of street-level harassment of religious groups by the authorities during the period covered by this report.

A number of religious groups have complained that foreign missionaries and religious leaders experience difficulties in obtaining and renewing residence visas in the country; the issuance of residence visas appears to be subject to the whim of individual authorities. New amendments to the Law on Foreign Persons, which went into effect on May 1, 2001, have created problems for foreign national missionaries and religious workers. The revised law has no visa category that explicitly applies to missionaries or religious workers, and rules for other categories of temporary residence visa (such as self-employed or business-owner) have been tightened in ways that seem to make it more difficult for religious workers to qualify. This problem has been exacerbated by the fact that key government institutions have not yet developed implementing regulations or procedures to handle their new responsibilities under the law, despite the fact that the new law is in force. American evangelical missionaries in Stara Zagora reported confusion and delays in their visa application process from October 2001 through June 2002, including bureaucrats demanding unexpected fees or bribes. Missionaries therefore may have to limit the time and purpose of their visits to the 30 days accorded to tourists. Human rights groups also have protested the cancellation of residence status of several persons on undisclosed national security grounds, alleging that the action was a pretext for religious discrimination. In one case involving Ahmed Musa, a human rights attorney asserted that the expulsion was motivated by the desire of the police to seize the assets of a religious foundation; however, this allegation has not been confirmed.

The high school curriculum includes a course on religion initiated by the Ministry of Education. The original plan called for a world religion course that avoided endorsing any particular faith; however, members of other religions, especially ethnic Turkish Muslims, maintain that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church receives privileged coverage in the textbooks. The religion course is optional and is not available at all schools.

Following the successful introduction of optional Islamic education courses in 2002, and the expected development of additional courses in 2004, there has been some discussion of requiring all students to enroll in a course on religion, and students would be given the option of which course they wish to take.

The Department of Theology of Sofia University changed its rules requiring all students to present an Orthodox Church baptismal certificate and married students to present an Orthodox marriage certificate in order to enroll in the Department's classes. This change has made it possible for non-Orthodox students to enroll in the Department.

The Government has abolished the construction and transportation battalions, to which ethnic and religious minorities previously were assigned in order to segregate them from the regular military forces. While the conscript troops of the military are integrated, the professional officer corps contains few members of ethnic or religious minority groups.

The failure of the Government to restitute certain confiscated properties remains a sore point in relations between various denominations and the State, and prevents these denominations from raising more revenue through the use or rental of such properties. There were no indications that the Government discriminated against members of any religious group in making restitution to previous owners of properties that were nationalized during the Communist period. However, NGOs and certain denominations claimed that a number of their properties confiscated under the Communist years have not been returned. For example, the Muslim community claims at least 17 properties around the country that have not been returned. The Orthodox Church, Catholic Church, Methodists, Adventists, and other groups also claim land or buildings in Sofia and other towns. Former Jewish properties mostly have been recovered over the last 10 years, with one exception in downtown Sofia that is pending before the court. A central problem facing all claimants is the need to demonstrate that the organization seeking restitution is the organization—or the legitimate successor of the organization—that owned the property prior to September 9, 1944. This is difficult because communist hostility to religion led some groups to hide assets or ownership, and because documents have been destroyed or lost over the years.

The law provides for alternative service for a 2-year period, more than twice as long as regular military service; universal conscripted military service is 9 months for most recruits, while university graduates serve just 6 months. Reportedly, several individuals are serving in an alternative civilian capacity in lieu of military service. Nonetheless, human rights observers complain that procedures for invoking this alternative as a conscientious objector are unclear. There were no new reports of incarcerations on religious grounds during the period covered by this report.

The Constitution prohibits the formation of political parties along religious lines.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

The Constitution prohibits forced religious conversion, and there were no reports of forced religious conversion or attempts at forced 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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In October 2002, the Government decided to transfer ownership of the property at 9 Suborna Street to the Jewish organization "Shalom," thus resolving one of two significant outstanding cases of Jewish community property restitution. Following the successful introduction of a program to provide optional Islamic education classes in primary schools in 2002, the Ministry of Education has agreed to assist with funding for such courses in 2004. The Chief Mufti's office reports that in 2002 it funded more than 1,000 students participation in the pilot program and expect other denominations to develop similar programs in 2004.

It appears that some local ordinances that restricted religious freedom have not been enforced, and in some cases were suspended, due to pressure from the central Government.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the major religious communities generally were amicable; however, discrimination, harassment, and general public intolerance of non-traditional religious groups (primarily newer evangelical Protestant groups) remained an intermittent problem. The number of reported incidents decreased during the period covered by this report. Strongly held suspicion of evangelical denominations among the populace is widespread and pervasive across the political spectrum and has resulted in discrimination. Often cloaked in a veneer of "patriotism," mistrust of the religious beliefs of others is common. Such mainstream public pressure for the containment of "foreign religious sects" inevitably influences policymakers. Nevertheless, human rights observers agreed that such discrimination has gradually lessened over the

last 5 years as society has appeared to become more accepting of at least some previously unfamiliar non-traditional religions.

There are disputes within the country's Muslim community, in part along ethnic lines. Most Bulgarian Muslims, the majority of whom are ethnic Turks, practice a moderate form of Sunni Islam. Some are concerned that Muslims of Bulgarian ethnicity ("Pomaks") and Roma Muslims, particularly those living in remote areas, are susceptible to "fundamentalist" (often referred to locally as "Arab" or "Wahabi") influences associated with foreign funding of mosque construction and the training of imams in Arab countries. Opponents of the Chief Mufti within the Muslim community have accused him of failing to counteract or even fomenting the spread of Islamic extremism; however, these charges have not been confirmed.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy regularly monitors religious freedom in ongoing contacts with government officials, clergy, lay leaders of minority communities, and NGOs. Embassy officers met with Orthodox clergy members (from both sides of the schism), the Chief Mufti and other senior Muslim leaders, with religious and lay leaders of the Jewish community, as well as with the leaders of numerous Protestant denominations. During the period covered by this report, the Embassy remained closely engaged with government and religious officials concerning the new law on religion, with various denominations regarding the restitution of properties, and with Muslim leaders regarding the war on terrorism. The Embassy maintained close contact with the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe regarding their views on the Confessions Act and a mutual goal of ensuring that international religious freedom standards are met.

CROATIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church enjoys a historic relationship with the State not shared by other religious groups. The position of the Islamic Community and the Serbian Orthodox Church has improved due to agreements with the State, which grants 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 democratic coalition Government continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Religion and ethnicity are linked closely in society. Since independence in 1991, religious institutions of all faiths have been victimized by the ethnic conflicts that led to the break up of the former Republic of Yugoslavia. Such violent incidents still occur, particularly in the war-affected areas where there were persistent reports of vandalism directed against Serb Orthodox buildings and cemeteries.

The U.S. Government discusses religious issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy officials frequently meet with representatives of religious and ethnic minority communities and with government officials.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 21,829 square miles, and its population is approximately 4,437,000. The religious breakdown of the country is approximately: Roman Catholic, 85 percent; Orthodox Christian, 6 percent; Muslim, 1 percent; Jewish, less than 1 percent; other, 4 percent; and atheist, 2 percent. The statistics correlate closely with the country's ethnic makeup. The Orthodox, predominantly ethnic Serbs associated with the Serbian Orthodox Church, primarily live in cities and border areas with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro. Members of other minority religions reside mostly in urban areas. Most immigrants are Roman Catholic ethnic Croats.

Protestants from a number of denominations and foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize, as do representatives of Eastern religions. A variety of missionaries are present in the country, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Greek Catholics, Pentecostals, Hare Krishnas, and a wide range of evangelical Protestant Christians (including Baptists,

Seventh-day Adventists, Church of Christ, and various nondenominational organizations such as the Campus Crusades for Christ).

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of conscience and religion and free public profession of religious conviction, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice. There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church, Serbian Orthodox Church, and Islamic Community receive some state support.

In July 2002, the Government passed the Law on Legal Status of Religious Communities, which broadly defines religious communities' legal position, and covers such issues as government funding, tax benefits, and religious education in schools. Other important issues, such as pensions for clergy, religious service in the military, penitentiaries and police, and recognition of religious marriages, were left to each religious community to negotiate separately with the Government. Most religious communities involved in the discussions on the draft considered the law an improvement over the existing state of affairs. However, some religious leaders and political parties expressed concern over instituting Catholic catechism in kindergarten, which was established previously in the Concordat agreements between the Vatican and the Government but never implemented. Restitution of nationalized or confiscated church property is regulated under the Law on Return of Property Expropriated or Nationalized During the Yugoslav Communist Rule, which was amended in July 2002.

In January the Government approved a regulation on the registration of religious communities, known as the "Regulation on Forms and Maintaining Records of Religious Communities in Croatia," which required all religious communities to submit registration applications within 6 months. The process of registration was not completed during the period covered by this report. The new regulation stipulates that to register, religious communities must have at least 500 believers, and must be registered as an association for 5 years. Registered religious communities will be granted the status of a "legal person," and will enjoy tax and other benefits under the Law on Religious Communities. Religious communities that are based abroad will need to submit written permission for registration from their country of origin. No specific licensing is required for foreign missionaries.

Representatives of minority religious communities indicate that the overall climate for religious freedom has improved since the January 2000 election of a democratic coalition government. Agreements between the State and the Islamic and the Serbian Orthodox communities provide a framework for a more balanced treatment of religious communities in comparison with the Catholic Church. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government was negotiating agreements with nine additional Christian Churches (Evangelical, Reformed Christian, Pentecostal, Christian Adventist, Union of Baptist Churches, Church of God, Church of the Christ, the Reformed Movement of Seventh-day Adventists, and the Union of Pentecostal Churches of Christ). While the Government has taken actions to eliminate religious discrimination, its approach is to negotiate with individual religious communities based on a common framework, rather than setting uniform, nondiscriminatory standards and practices. Leaders of minority religions have expressed satisfaction with the communication and cooperation they have received from the Government, most notably with the Government Commission on Relations with Religious Communities, chaired by a Deputy Prime Minister.

An agreement between the Catholic Church and the state-run Croatian State Radio and Television (HRT) provides regular, extensive coverage of Catholic events (as many as 10 hours per month). Other religious communities receive approximately 10 minutes broadcast time per month or less. The Catholic Church operates one of the country's private national radio stations, Catholic Radio, which is financed by private contributions. The Jewish community reports no restrictions on religious broadcasting. Topics of interest to major non-Catholic religious groups are covered regularly on weekly religious programming on HRT. The Muslim community's Bairam ceremony, usually attended by high-level government officials, is telecast live annually from the Zagreb Mosque.

Missionaries do not operate registered schools, but the Mormon community provides free English lessons, which normally are offered in conjunction with education on the Mormon religion. The Ministry of Education recognizes the diploma conferred by the Muslim community's secondary school in Zagreb. Enrollment in the school subsequently has increased by more than 50 percent and is at full capacity.

Muslims have the right to observe their religious holidays. They are granted a paid holiday for one Bairam and have the right to observe the other as well (although they are not paid for the day).

There is no government-sponsored ecumenical activity.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government imposes no formal restrictions on religious groups, and all religious communities are free to conduct public services and to open and run social and charitable institutions.

There is no official state religion; however, the Roman Catholic Church receives some state support and other benefits established in concordats between the Government and the Vatican. In December 2002, similar agreements were signed with the Serbian Orthodox Church and Islamic Community. At the end of the period covered by this report, negotiations were underway with other Christian Churches and the Jewish Community to reach similar agreements. The concordats and the agreements with the Islamic and Orthodox communities allow state financing for some salaries and pensions for priests and nuns through government-managed pension and health funds.

They also regulate recognition of marriages, public school catechisms, and military chaplains. The Ministry of Defense employs 17 full-time and 6 part-time Catholic priests and chaplains. After signing the agreement with the Serbian Orthodox Church, five Orthodox priests began service in prisons and penitentiaries, and the Islamic Community plans to employ three priests in the same service.

Catholic, Islamic, and Serbian Orthodox marriages are recognized by the State, eliminating the need to register them in the civil registry office.

Facilitating the return of refugees is a challenge for the Government, which has made progress in a number of areas relating to returns. However, many ethnic Serbs who wish to return to Croatia, including Serbian Orthodox clergy, continued to encounter difficulties recovering their prewar property and reconstructing damaged or destroyed houses. There were no reports of specific discrimination against Orthodox clergy beyond that faced by other ethnic Serb citizen refugees. Orthodox officials report that approximately 30 percent of prewar Orthodox clergy have returned to the war-affected areas, indicating that the proportion of returning clergy is somewhat greater than that of the general Serb population. Religion and ethnicity are linked closely in society, but the majority of incidents of discrimination are motivated by ethnicity rather than religion or religious doctrine. A pattern of often open and severe discrimination continues against ethnic Serbs, and, at times, other minorities in a wide number of areas, including the administration of justice, employment, housing, and freedom of movement.

The Government requires that religious training be provided in public schools, although attendance is optional. Given that 85 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, the Catholic catechism is the predominant one offered in public schools. Schools that meet the necessary quota of seven students of a minority faith per class offered separate religion classes for the students. In cases where there are not sufficient numbers of students of a minority faith to warrant separate classes, students may exercise the option to receive religious instruction through their religious community. An estimated 4,500 primary and secondary school children in 37 schools attend Orthodox religion classes, the majority of which are in Eastern Slavonia, Rijeka, and Gorski Kotar. Orthodox officials report that they have good cooperation with the Ministry of Education, which organizes a series of orientation seminars for the teachers prior to the beginning of the school year. Jewish officials noted in 2003 that basic information about Judaism provided to students was inaccurate. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Islamic Community, which initially opposed the idea of religious training in kindergarten, was negotiating with the Ministry of Education on the curriculum and staff to provide religious education in kindergartens beginning with the Fall 2003 school term.

Restitution of property nationalized or confiscated by the Yugoslav Communist regime remains a problem. Major religious communities, including the Catholic Church, identify property return as their top priority, and complain about the lack of progress. The Government has claimed that while only 20 percent of all restitution cases have been resolved, 35 percent of the total of restitution cases of religious communities have been solved. A 1998 concordat with the Vatican provided for the return of all Catholic Church property confiscated by the Communist regime after 1945. The agreement stipulates that the Government would return seized properties or compensate the Church where return is impossible. Some progress was made with some returnable properties being restituted; however, there has been no compensation to date for non-returnable properties. In April the Catholic Church submitted a list of properties to the Government that included large commercial build-

ings, recreational property, and several properties already in use by the Church, such as monasteries, dormitories, and residences for children with disabilities. However, at the same time, Catholic Church officials publicly stated that the process of restitution of property had stopped. In June just prior to the visit of the Pope, government officials revealed plans to offer the Catholic Church a 25 percent stake in the country's largest insurance company, Croatia Osiguranje, as compensation for property that is non-returnable. Based on some estimates the Government's offer could be worth approximately \$45 million (50 million euros).

Other than the Law on Return of Property Expropriated or Nationalized During Yugoslav Communist Rule, there are no specific property restitution agreements between the Government and non-Catholic religious groups. The Orthodox community has filed several requests for the return of seized properties, and some cases have been resolved successfully, particularly cases involving buildings in urban centers. However, several buildings in downtown Zagreb have not been returned, nor have properties that belonged to monasteries, such as arable land and forest. Such uneven progress may be the result of a slow judicial system rather than a systematic effort to deny restitution of Orthodox properties.

Several Jewish properties, including some Zagreb buildings, have not been returned. The process of returning nationalized property to the Jewish community is at a near-standstill. There has been no progress on the restitution of the Haver Kadosh Building in Zagreb previously owned by a Jewish organization. The World War II Jasenovac concentration camp, site of a memorial and museum, was damaged severely during the 1991-95 conflict and renovation remained ongoing. In May President Mesic gave the keynote address at a commemoration ceremony at the camp that also was attended by government officials and leaders of ethnic and religious minority communities.

In May local authorities in Rijeka approved the design for a mosque that the Muslim Community has been trying to build since 1982. A location permit was first issued in 1991, but local opposition to the mosque and bureaucratic and financial obstacles combined over the years to delay the project. Although the location must again be approved and construction permits issued, officials within the Muslim community expect construction to begin in early 2004.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Religion and ethnicity are closely linked in society, and religion often was used to identify non-Croats and single them out for discriminatory practices. Such attitudes led to religious institutions being the target of violence. During the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s, religious institutions of all faiths were targets of violence. Such incidents still occur, particularly in the war-affected areas, in which there were persistent reports of vandalism directed against Serb Orthodox buildings and cemeteries.

Both international observers and religious leaders note that overall ethnic and religious relations are improving slowly. Incidents typically include destruction and vandalism of church property and harassment of clergy. In September 2002, arsonists set fire to a building and destroyed icons belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church in Osijek; in a separate incident in Osijek, the Catholic Church of St. Mary was vandalized. Also in September 2002 and again in April, tombstones were damaged at an ethnic Serb military cemetery in Vukovar. In August 2002, police failed to act in Sibenik when cars were used to block the entrance to Serbian Orthodox Church offices and prevent the local bishop from exiting the building. Also in Sibenik in August 2002, no charges were brought against a person who was detained for repeatedly throwing garbage and verbally abusing a Serbian Orthodox priest. Serbian Orthodox leaders report that in Knin the Church of St. Pokrov is frequently desecrated with fascist Ustasha symbols.

The Muslim and Jewish Communities have reported no major incidents of violence or harassment toward religious persons or sites during the period covered by this report. However, in June insulting graffiti appeared on the walls and minaret of the Zagreb mosque. Police investigated but no arrests have been made in the case.

Relations between the Government and the Jewish Community have steadily improved since the election of the new Government in 2000. In October 2001, Presi-

dent Mesic visited Israel and apologized for the persecution of Jews by the fascist World War II-era Ustasha government. The January 2002 visit of an Israeli Knesset delegation further improved already good bilateral relations. As with other smaller religious communities, the primary issue for the Jewish Community is the return of property either confiscated or nationalized by the Communist regime of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, of which the restitution of even part would significantly affect the community's financial well-being.

Conservative elements within the Catholic hierarchy have expressed dissatisfaction with government policies, including cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia, and have expressed concern for citizens indicted for war crimes.

Since Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb Josip Bozanic took office in 1997 and became head of the HBK, the Catholic Church has sought a more proactive role in advocating reconciliation. In January Bozanic publicly endorsed Croatia's European Union (EU) membership aspirations after meeting with Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission. In a June visit, Pope John Paul II met with members of the Serbian Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic communities and called for ethnic reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Catholic Radio includes a monthly program on ecumenism, inviting speakers from other religious communities. Ecumenical efforts among the religious communities have developed in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. For example, religious leaders meet frequently to discuss issues of mutual interest and to cooperate and coordinate with the Government Commission for Relations with Religious Communities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government actively works to encourage the Government to respect religious freedom in practice. U.S. Embassy officials meet frequently at all levels with representatives of religious communities and are engaged in the promotion of human rights, including the religious rights of these groups. The Embassy plays a leading role among diplomatic missions on issues of ethnic and religious reconciliation, and human rights.

CYPRUS

The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The basic law in the Turkish Cypriot community also provides for freedom of religion, and the Turkish Cypriot authorities generally respect this right in practice. However, the politically divisive environment on Cyprus occasionally affected aspects of religious freedom.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. Although reciprocal visits to religious sites were restricted during the period covered by this report, developments in April 2003 that facilitated crossings by both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to visit religious sites located across the buffer zone led to significant improvements.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in Cypriot society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a few reports of vandalism of unused religious sites.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 3,571 square miles, and its population is estimated at 793,000. Prior to 1974, the country experienced a long period of intercommunal strife between its Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. In response, the U.N. Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) began peacekeeping operations in 1964. The island has been divided since the Turkish military intervention of 1974, following a coup d'etat directed from Greece; the southern part of the island is under the control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, while the northern part is ruled by a Turkish Cypriot administration. In 1983 that administration proclaimed itself the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" ("TRNC"). The "TRNC" is not recognized by the United States or any other country except Turkey. A buffer zone patrolled by the UNFICYP separates the two parts. Approximately 96 percent of the population in the government-controlled area is Greek Orthodox. Approximately 0.7 percent of the

remaining population are Maronite, slightly less than 0.4 percent are Armenian Orthodox, 0.1 percent are Latin (Roman Catholic), and 3.2 percent belong to other groups; the latter category includes small groups of Cypriot Protestants and foreigners of various religious beliefs.

A 1998 opinion poll indicated that about 48 percent of Greek Cypriots attend church services regularly, while 49 percent attend only for major religious holidays and ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. The remainder does not attend religious services at all. Approximately 10 percent of the population in the north attend religious services regularly.

An estimated 99 percent of the Turkish Cypriot population is at least nominally Muslim. There is a small Turkish Cypriot Baha'i community. Most other non-Muslims in the north are foreigners from Western Europe who are frequently members of the Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches.

There is some western Protestant missionary activity in the government-controlled area.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The basic law in the Turkish Cypriot community also provides for freedom of religion, and the authorities generally respect this right in practice. Turkish Cypriots residing in the south and Greek Cypriots living in the north are allowed to practice their religions. The 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus specifies that the Greek Orthodox Church (which is autocephalous and not under the authority of the mainland Greek Orthodox Church) has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with its holy canons and charter. The Constitution states that the Turkish Cypriot religious trust, the Vakf (the Muslim institution that regulates religious activity for Turkish Cypriots), has the exclusive right to regulate and administer its internal affairs and property in accordance with Vakf laws and principles. No legislative, executive, or other act can contravene or interfere with the Orthodox Church or the Vakf. Both the Greek Orthodox Church and the Vakf are exempt from taxes with regard to religious activity. According to law, they are required to pay taxes only on strictly commercial activity.

Three other religious groups are recognized in the Constitution: Armenian Orthodox, Maronite Christians, and Latins (Roman Catholics). These groups also are exempt from taxes and are eligible, along with the Greek Orthodox Church and the Vakf, for government subsidies to their religious institutions. No other religious group is recognized in the Constitution.

Both the Government of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriot administration have constitutional or legal bars against religious discrimination. The basic agreement covering treatment of Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the north and Turkish Cypriots living in the south remains the 1975 Vienna III Agreement. Among other things, this agreement provides for facilities for religious worship.

Religions other than the five recognized religions are not required to register with government authorities; however, if they desire to engage in financial transactions, such as maintaining a bank account, they must register as a nonprofit company, and most do so. The registration process involves submission through an attorney of an application that states the purpose of the nonprofit organization and provides the names of the organization's directors. Annual reports of the organization's activities are required. Such nonprofit organizations are tax-exempt. Registration is granted promptly, and many religious groups are recognized. No religious groups were denied registration during the period covered by this report.

There are no prohibitions against missionary activity or proselytizing in the government-controlled areas. Foreign missionaries must obtain and periodically renew residence permits in order to live in the country; normally renewal requests are not denied.

Instruction in the Greek Orthodox religion is mandatory for all Greek Orthodox children and is taught in all public primary and secondary schools in classes held twice per week in the government-controlled area. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses and Maronite parents can request that their children be excused from such instruction. However, reports indicated that while these children are exempted from attending religious services, they are not excused from all religious instruction. There are no reports of practitioners of other religions requesting such an exemption.

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported some difficulties in claiming conscientious objector status and exemption from required reserve military service in the Greek Cypriot National Guard. While the law provides for exemption from active

military service for conscientious objectors, it does not provide such an exemption from reserve duty. Legal proceedings were begun against several members of Jehovah's Witnesses for failure to appear for reserve duty. Their cases were suspended pending a revision of the law.

There is no government-sponsored interfaith activity.

The Government of Cyprus recognizes the following religious holidays as national holidays: the Epiphany, Annunciation, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Holy Spirit Day, Assumption Day, and Christmas Day.

In the northern part of the island, the Turkish Cypriot basic law refers specifically to a "secular republic," and provides for religious freedom; no specific religion is recognized in the basic law. However, based on the 1960 Constitution, the Vakf, which pays the costs of Muslim religious activities and the salaries of Muslim religious leaders, is tax-exempt in regard to its religious activities (the Vakf pays taxes on its commercial and real estate operations) and receives official subsidies. No other religious organization is tax-exempt or receives subsidies.

Religious organizations are not required to register with the Turkish Cypriot authorities unless they wish to engage in commercial activity or apply for tax-exempt status. There are no legal restrictions on missionary activity; however, such activity is rare.

There is instruction in religion, ethics, and comparative religions in two grades of the primary school system in the Turkish Cypriot community. There is no formal Islamic religious instruction in public schools, and there are no state-supported religious schools.

The Turkish Cypriot authorities do not sponsor any interfaith activity.

The following religious holidays are observed widely in the Turkish Cypriot community: Kurban Bairam, Birthday of the Prophet, and Ramazan Bairam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

A 1997 reciprocal agreement allowed Greek Cypriots to visit the Apostolos Andreas monastery in the north on designated Christian religious holidays, and Turkish Cypriots to visit the Hala Sultan Tekke mosque in the south on certain Muslim religious holidays. Beginning in 1998, Greek Cypriots who wished to visit Apostolos Andreas monastery were required to pay a processing fee imposed by Turkish Cypriot authorities on all Greek Cypriots crossing the buffer zone.

However, due to an incident in the buffer zone protested by UNFICYP and others in July 2000, reciprocal visits to religious sites were suspended. This incident was not related to the 1997 agreement. Turkish forces established a checkpoint in a location adjacent to the Greek Cypriot village of Strovilia and the British eastern Sovereign Base Areas and remained at the contested checkpoint in violation of the status quo despite protests from the UNFICYP and others. Turkish forces restricted UNFICYP movement, including refusing to allow the UNFICYP to man a checkpoint in Kokkina.

On July 31, 2000, Greek Cypriot officials responded to those moves and denied Turkish Cypriots land passage to Kokkina. Visits to this pocket of land (which contains a Turkish Cypriot nonreligious memorial and is surrounded by the government-controlled area) are included in the 1997 reciprocal visit agreement. In response, in August and November 2000, Turkish Cypriot officials denied access for Greek Cypriots living in the south to visit the Apostolos Andreas monastery. In August 2000, Turkish Cypriot visits to Hala Sultan Tekke under the 1997 reciprocal agreement were also suspended.

In May 2001, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the Government of Turkey was responsible for restrictions imposed on Greek Cypriots resident in the north in regard to their access to places of worship and participation in other areas of religious life. On April 23, Turkish Cypriot authorities relaxed restrictions on individuals crossing between the two communities, including abolishing all crossing fees. As of June 30, there had been over 790,000 crossings of the buffer zone in both directions. Greek Cypriots have reported relatively easy access to Apostolos Andreas monastery, while Turkish Cypriots have visited religious sites in the government-controlled area. However, land passage to Kokkina is still restricted. Some Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots report that slow processing at buffer zone checkpoints has limited the number of people who can travel across the buffer zone to visit religious sites during holidays.

In May the Bishop of Morphou (now resident in the Government-controlled area, although his traditional seat is located in the north) visited a church in the Turkish Cypriot community now used as a religious museum. On his initial visit, he is reported to have conducted a private religious service. Later, accompanied by Greek Cypriot television crews, he returned to the church, but Turkish Cypriot authorities barred him from performing services. Church services conducted by priests resident

in north Cyprus are permitted only in designated religious facilities. Otherwise, a special permit is necessary. The Bishop was not resident in the north and did not have a special permit, nor did Turkish Cypriot authorities recognize the museum as a designated religious facility.

In February 2003, the Turkish Cypriot administration returned two houses of worship to Jehovah's Witnesses that it had expropriated in 1997. In August 2002, the Turkish-Cypriot administration lifted a ban prohibiting several ministers of Jehovah's Witnesses from entering north Cyprus, after they were deported in 1997.

In 2001 Turkish Cypriot authorities and the Government of Cyprus came to an agreement, after four years, on the assignment of a second Orthodox priest to work in the north. However, a suitable candidate had not been identified by the end of the period covered by this report.

Although Maronites (members of a Christian sect originating in Lebanon) may not visit certain religious sites in the north located in military zones, they traditionally have been able to cross without hindrance. Armenians may not visit any religious sites in the north.

Although missionaries have the legal right to proselytize in both communities, missionary activities are monitored closely by both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot authorities. The police may initiate investigations of religious activity based on a citizen's complaint under laws that make it illegal for a missionary to use "physical or moral compulsion" in an attempt to make religious conversions. They also may investigate when missionaries may be involved in illegal activities that threaten the security of the republic, constitutional or public order, or public health and morals. There are occasional apprehensions under these laws resulting in publicity but no arrests. On June 20, 2002, police brought in three American citizens who were walking along a busy Turkish Cypriot road with a large Christian cross to Turkish Cypriot police headquarters. They were warned that their activity was unwise in a Muslim area and released.

In both the government-controlled areas and the Turkish Cypriot community, there were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

In both the government-controlled areas and the Turkish Cypriot community, there were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are polite relations between the Greek Cypriot Orthodox Church and the other religious communities in the south. In the north there are few non-Muslims, but there is no friction between them and the nominally Muslim population. Greek Cypriots living in the north report that unused Orthodox churches and cemeteries continued to be robbed and vandalized. Although Turkish Cypriots reported that unused mosques in the south also have been vandalized, the Government routinely carried out maintenance and repair of mosques in the south. During the period covered by this report, the Government restored a mosque in the southern town of Limassol at the request of Turkish Cypriot residents.

The Orthodox Church is suspicious of any attempts to proselytize among Greek Cypriots and closely monitors such activities.

Religion is a significantly more prominent component of Greek Cypriot society than of Turkish Cypriot society, with correspondingly greater cultural and political influence. One example of the relationship between church and state among Greek Cypriots is the fact that the leader of the Greek Cypriot campaign for independence in the 1950's was the head of the Greek Orthodox Church, Archbishop Makarios III, who became president from independence in 1960 and served until his death in 1977. Bishops and priests are also known to include political messages in their Sunday sermons.

As the largest owner of real estate in the south and the operator of several large business enterprises, the Greek Orthodox Church is a significant economic factor. Similarly, the Vakf is the largest landowner in the north.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Embassy played a key role, working closely with the U.N., in obtaining agreement from both sides in January 2000 to initiate a project to restore the island's two most significant religious sites, the Apostolos Andreas monastery and the

Hala Sultan mosque. Restoration work at the sites began in 2001 based on recommendations from the world's leading experts in structures of this type and period. Both sites have been cleaned, fenced, and re-landscaped. The ancillary buildings at both sites have been renovated, and work on the church and mosque buildings is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2002. The U.S. Embassy continues to discuss this project with religious authorities in both communities.

The Ambassador and other Embassy officers meet periodically with Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot religious authorities regarding specific religious freedom concerns.

CZECH REPUBLIC

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 30,379 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10.3 million. The country has a largely homogenous population with a dominant Christian tradition. However, primarily as a result of 40 years of Communist rule between 1948 and 1989, the vast majority of the citizens do not identify themselves as members of any organized religion. In a 2001 opinion poll, 38 percent of respondents claimed to believe in God, while 52 percent identified themselves as atheists. Nearly half of those responding agreed that churches were beneficial to society. There was a revival of interest in religion after the 1989 "Velvet Revolution;" however, the number of those professing religious beliefs or participating in organized religion has fallen steadily since then in almost every region of the country.

An estimated 5 percent of the population attend Catholic services weekly. Most live in the southern Moravian dioceses of Olomouc and Brno. The number of practicing Protestants is even lower (approximately 1 percent of the population). Leaders of the local Muslim community estimate that there are 20,000 to 30,000 Muslims, although Islam has not been registered as an officially recognized religion since the Communist takeover in 1948. There is a mosque in Brno and another in Prague. The Jewish community, which numbers only a few thousand persons, is an officially registered religion due to its recognition by the State before 1989.

Missionaries of various religious groups, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, are present in the country. Missionaries of various religions generally proselytize without hindrance.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Religious affairs are the responsibility of the Department of Churches at the Ministry of Culture. All religious groups officially registered with the Ministry of Culture are eligible to receive subsidies from the State, although some decline state financial support as a matter of principle and as an expression of their independence. There are 25 state-recognized, 4 of which registered during the period covered by this report. The four newly registered groups are Christian Fellowships, the Christian Community in the Czech Republic, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the Czech Hindu Religious Society. Although no groups sought to register by the end of the period covered by this report, three groups inquired about the process. In 1999 the Department of Churches denied registration to the Unification Church (UC) when it determined that the UC had obtained the required proof of membership by fraud. In 2002 the courts upheld the Government's decision to

deny registration; however, an appeal of that decision remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. Registration of Islam has been discussed with the Department of Churches, but there has been no formal application.

The 2002 law on "Religious Freedom and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations" created a two-tiered system of registration for religious organizations. In order to register at the first tier, a religious group must have at least 300 adult members permanently residing in the country. First-tier registration conveys limited tax benefits and imposes annual reporting requirements, as well as a 10-year waiting period before the organization may apply for full second-tier registration. To register at the second tier, a religious group must have membership equal to at least 0.1 percent of the country's population (approximately 10,000 persons) and have been registered at the first tier for at least 10 years. Second-tier registration entitles the organization to a share of state funding. Only clergy of registered second-tier organizations may perform officially recognized marriage ceremonies and serve as chaplains in the military and prisons, though prisoners of other faiths may receive visits from their respective clergy. Prior to the 2002 law, registered religious groups automatically received second-tier status. Religious groups registered prior to 1991, such as the small Jewish community, are not required to meet these conditions for registration. Unregistered religious groups, such as the small Muslim minority, may not legally own community property but often form civic-interest associations for the purpose of managing their property and other holdings until they are able to meet the qualifications for registration. The Government does not interfere with or prevent this type of interim solution. Unregistered religious groups otherwise are free to assemble and worship in the manner of their choice.

Religious organizations receive approximately \$106 million (3 billion Czech crowns) annually from the Government. Funds are divided proportionally among the 21 registered religions based on the number of clergy in each, with the exception of 4 religions (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the New Apostolic Church, and Open Brethren) that do not accept state funding. Of this sum, approximately \$26 million (728 million Czech crowns) is used to pay salaries to clergymen. The rest of the funding goes to state grants for religious organizations' medical, charitable, and educational activities, as well as for the maintenance of religious memorials and buildings.

A 2000 law outlaws Holocaust denial and provides for prison sentences of 6 months to 3 years for public denial, questioning, approval, or attempts to justify the Nazi genocide. The law also outlaws the incitement of hatred based on religion.

Missionaries must obtain a long-term residence and work permit if they intend to remain longer than 30 days. There were no reports of delays in processing visas for missionaries during the period covered by this report. There is no special visa category for religious workers; foreign missionaries and clergy are required to meet the relatively stringent conditions for a standard work permit even if their activity is strictly ecclesiastical or voluntary in nature.

Religion is not taught in public schools, although a few private religious schools exist. Religious broadcasters are free to operate without hindrance from the Government or other parties.

The Government continued its effort to resolve religious-based communal and personal property restitution problems, especially with regard to Jewish property; however, progress has been slow. Jewish claims date to the period of the Nazi occupation, while Catholic authorities are pressing claims to properties that were seized under the former Communist regime. Although after 1989 the Government and Prague city officials returned most synagogues and buildings previously belonging to religious orders, many claims to properties in the hands of other municipal authorities and individuals have not yet been resolved. Restitution or compensation of several categories of Jewish personal property is in progress. In addition the Catholic Church claims vast tracts of woods and farmlands.

The 1991 Law on Restitution applied only to property seized after the Communists took power in 1948. In 1994 the Parliament amended the law to provide for restitution or compensation for property wrongfully seized between 1938 and 1945. This amendment provided for the inclusion of Jewish private properties, primarily buildings, seized by the Nazi regime. In 1994 the Federation of Jewish Communities identified 202 communal properties as its highest priorities for restitution, although it had unresolved claims for over 1,000 properties. By decree the Government returned most of the properties in its possession, as did the city of Prague; however, despite a government appeal, other cities have not been as responsive. As of the end of the period covered by this report, only 68 of the 202 properties had been returned. A 2000 law authorized the return of 200 communal Jewish properties identified by the Federation of Jewish Communities that had been in the possession of the State. The Government continued to evaluate these claims at the end

of the period covered by this report. The same law also authorized the Government to return more than 60 works of art in the National Gallery to the Jewish community and an estimated 7,000 works of art in the Government's possession to individual Jewish citizens and their descendants. Another provision of the law authorized the return of certain agricultural property in the Government's possession to its original owners. A government resolution passed in March should result in the return of approximately 40 more properties.

In September 2000, the Government proposed and the Chamber of Deputies authorized approximately \$10.6 million (300 million Czech crowns) for a compensation fund to pay for those properties that cannot be restituted physically. The fund began operating in June 2001 under the control of an independent board. It is expected to provide partial compensation in those cases where the Government needs to retain the property or is no longer in possession of it, to help meet the social needs of poor Jewish communities, and to support the restoration of synagogues and cemeteries. Approximately two-thirds of the funds are to be dedicated to communal property and one-third to individual claims. Applications for the fund were accepted from June through December 2001. At the end of the period covered by this report, the fund had distributed the majority of the \$3.5 million (100 million Czech crowns) dedicated to individual claims, as well as approximately \$882,000 (25 million Czech crowns) dedicated to social grants.

Certain property of religious orders, including 175 monasteries and other institutions, was restituted under laws passed in 1990 and 1991. The Catholic Church still claims some 175,000 hectares of "income-generating properties." Many of these properties are vast tracts of farm and woodland that are now in the hands of municipal governments or private owners. These current owners claim that the Catholic Church was granted the use of the properties under the Hapsburg empire but that the Church was never the owner of the properties in question and that the Government owes the Church no duty of restitution. When the Social Democratic government came to power in 1998, it halted further restitution of non-Jewish religious communal property, including a decision of the previous government to return 432,250 acres of land and some 700 buildings to the Catholic Church. Efforts to resolve the final claims continue but have been slowed by the Church's refusal to provide a list of specific properties and land to which it feels entitled and the Government's refusal to continue restitution discussions without this list. In April 2001, the Government agreed in principle to draft a law that would allow for the return of the remaining houses of worship, parish houses, and monasteries to the Catholic Church. No legislation had been drafted by the end of the period covered by this report.

Members of unregistered religious groups may issue publications without interference.

The Government and the Embassy held an interfaith service at St. Vitus Cathedral to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks. There was little other government-sponsored interfaith activity.

Two government commissions were established in 1999 to improve relations between the State and religious groups. One of the commissions was a "political" commission with the presence of all parties represented in Parliament, and the second was a "specialist" commission composed of experts, including lawyers, economists, and representatives of religious groups. The commissions advised the Government on religious questions and legislation on religious topics. The Commissions have now dissolved following the passage of the 2002 law on "Religious Freedom and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

Several unregistered religious groups, including Muslims and the Church of Scientology, have criticized the 2002 law on registration of religious groups because they believe that it is prejudicial against smaller religious groups. The Catholic Church also has criticized the law on the grounds that it unduly restricts the manner in which the Church manages and finances many of its social projects. In November 2002, a Constitutional Court decision struck down provisions of the act relating to registering new subsidiaries of religious organizations, as well as those provisions barring use of profits from enterprises owned by religious organizations for religious activity.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 May 2002, the Parliament passed a measure to extend the deadline for filing art restitution claims for Holocaust victims by 4 years, which subsequently was signed into law by the President. The deadline had been set for December 31, 2002, but was extended until December 31, 2006. The Ministry of Culture approved the registration applications of four religious organizations during the period covered by this report—Christian Fellowships, the Christian Community in the Czech Republic, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the Czech Hindu Religious Society. In May 2002, the Ministry of Interior opened a Muslim prayer room for inmates at Prague's Ruzyně Prison in conjunction with the Islamic Foundation of Prague. The Foundation has also advised the prison on how to prepare appropriate food and how to facilitate Islamic prisoners' observance of Ramadan.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The immigrant population is still relatively small and includes persons from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia. Immigrants have not reported any difficulties in practicing their respective faiths.

Local Muslims reported no incidents of religious intolerance toward their community during the period covered by this report.

A small but persistent and fairly well-organized extreme rightwing movement with anti-Semitic views exists in the country. The Ministry of Interior continued its efforts to counter the neo-Nazis, which included increased monitoring of their activities, closer cooperation with police units in neighboring countries, and concentrated efforts to shut down unauthorized concerts and gatherings of neo-Nazi groups. On January 30, vandals spray-painted swastikas and other anti-Semitic slogans on Jewish graves at a cemetery in Ostrava. On July 18, 2002, police in Jihlava destroyed dozens of posters bearing neo-Nazi insignia and messages. On June 30, 2002, vandals defaced a newly unveiled memorial to Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Karlovy Vary. Red paint was sprayed on the memorial, and anti-Semitic posters were left at the scene. On June 26, 2002, a smoke bomb was thrown through the window of a bookshop in Liberec, where the country's Chief Rabbi was attending a public meeting. In December 2000, police in Zlín uncovered another group distributing neo-Nazi recordings, publications, and badges. A 21-year-old woman was charged with suppressing rights and freedoms; her case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

A book published in May entitled "Taboo in Social Sciences" drew criticism for presenting racist and anti-Semitic views in a scientific manner. The book's high sales volume prompted representatives of the Jewish Community in Prague to warn against allowing extremism to creep into mainstream culture. During 2001 a court convicted Vit Varak on charges of disseminating hate speech and propagation of a movement aimed at suppressing rights and freedoms for selling "Mein Kampf" on the Internet. Varak was given a suspended sentence and fined, but the Constitutional Court later annulled his verdict. New charges have been brought against Varak, and the case was still 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 in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Government efforts on religious issues have focused largely on encouraging the Government and religious groups to resolve religious property restitution claims and registration of religious organizations.

During the period covered by this report, U.S. Government and Embassy officials emphasized on numerous occasions to the Government and religious groups the importance of restitution (or fair and adequate compensation when return is no longer possible) in cases pending from property wrongfully taken from Holocaust victims, the Jewish community, and churches.

The Embassy maintains close contact with the Office of the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, representatives of various religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations. Embassy officials met on several occa-

sions 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 Muslims, Scientologists, the Unification Church, and Hare Krishnas. Several meetings were held with representatives from the Ministry of Culture, the Roman Catholic Church, the Federation of Jewish Communities, and the Prague Jewish Community on restitution issues. Embassy officials also responded to individual requests for assistance from Czech-American Holocaust victims seeking compensation.

DENMARK

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church and enjoys some privileges not available to other faiths.

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 16,640 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.4 million. As of January 2002, 84.3 percent of the population belonged to the official Evangelical Lutheran Church. The second largest religious community is Muslim, constituting approximately three percent of the population, followed by the Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Pentecostals, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jews. The remaining approximately 9 percent of the citizens are without a religion.

Missionaries operate within the country, including representatives of the Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses; however, there is no detailed information available on missionary activity.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is an official state religion. The Constitution stipulates that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the national church, and it is the only Church that is subsidized directly by the Government. However, no individual may be compelled to pay church tax or provide direct financial support to the national church or any other religious organization. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the only religious organization that can receive funds directly through the tax system (although any tax payer may choose not to contribute), and pastors from the Evangelical Lutheran church receive wages that are subsidized by the state and not fully covered by voluntary taxes. Members of other faiths, notably Catholics, have argued that the system is not fair, and that although the Government provides for religious freedom, it does not provide for religious equality. Allowing other religious organizations to be given the same status and privileges as the Evangelical Lutheran Church would require changes to the Constitution.

The Government does not require that religious groups be licensed; however, the State's permission is required for religious ceremonies, such as weddings, if they are to have civil validity. Although there is no civil or criminal penalty for not registering, non-registered religious organizations do not qualify for tax exempt status. Eleven other religious organizations have official recognition by royal decree (essentially the State's permission for a religious organization to perform religious ceremonies that have civil validity).

The Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has granted permission to clergy of 60 additional, non-recognized religious organizations to perform marriages. The Marriage Act permits weddings to be performed "within other religious organizations," provided that one of the parties to the marriage belongs to the organization, and the

organization has clergy that have been granted permission to perform marriage by the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. Thus, religious organizations no longer need to obtain “recognition” since “approval” is given when the Ministry grants permission to perform weddings to specific religious organizations. Both recognized and approved religions enjoy certain tax exemptions. The approval process is not complicated or protracted.

Guidelines for future approval of religious organizations, linked to the 1969 Marriage Act and published in 1999, established clear requirements that religious organizations must fulfill. These include providing the following: A written text of the religion’s central traditions; descriptions of its most important rituals; an organizational structure accessible for public control and approval; and constitutionally elected representatives who may be held responsible by the authorities. Additionally, the organization must “not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order.”

Scientologists did not seek official approval as a religious organization during the period covered by this report. Their first application for approval was made in the early 1970s and rejected; the second and third applications were made in 1976 and 1982 and both were denied. In mid-1997 the Scientologists filed a fourth application, which was suspended at their request in 2000. In suspending their application, the Scientologists asked the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs to clarify the approval procedure; however, according to the Ministry, the Scientologists first must submit an application before the Ministry can provide any feedback. Despite the Scientologist’s unofficial status, the church maintains its European headquarters in Copenhagen.

There are no restrictions on proselytizing so long as proselytizers 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.

After several years of searching for an appropriate site, the Muslim community identified a piece of land in Broendby on which they would like to build the country’s first Muslim cemetery. The Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, the Copenhagen municipal government, and the Broendby municipal authorities have agreed to the sale. However, little progress has been made towards that goal because of disagreements concerning the value of the land and how the minority umbrella organization INDSam will pay for it. A growing number of municipalities have set aside pieces of land for the purposes of building Muslim cemeteries, and more and more parishes have allocated sections of their cemeteries for Muslim burials. Nonetheless, those sections do not meet all of the requirements of the Muslim community, so it would still prefer to have a cemetery of its own. The Muslim community also was attempting to identify a site and funding for the construction of a full-scale mosque in the country at the end of the period covered by this report. Authorities have agreed to the sale, but the community also continues to try to raise the appropriate funds.

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 ATTITUDES

The country has a long history of welcoming religious minorities and affording them equal treatment. There are generally amicable relations between religious groups, although the recent influx of a substantial Muslim population has resulted in some tension with the majority population of adherents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Minority group unemployment tends to be higher, and allegations of discrimination on the basis of religion sometimes are raised. However, it is difficult to separate religious differences from differences in language and ethnicity, and the latter may be at least as important in explaining unequal access to well-paying jobs and social advancement. The integration of immigrant groups from Islamic countries has become an important political and social topic of discussion.

There were isolated incidents of anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant vandalism, primarily graffiti, during the period covered by this report. The Government criticized the incidents and investigated several of them.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

ESTONIA

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 17,666 square miles and a population of 1.36 million (65 percent ethnic Estonian and 35 percent Russian-speaking). The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC) is the largest denomination, with 165 congregations and approximately 180,000 members. The Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC) has 59 congregations with approximately 20,000 members and the Estonian Orthodox Church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP), has 30 congregations with approximately 150,000–200,000 members. There are smaller communities of Baptists, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Old Believers, Methodists, and other denominations. There is a small Jewish community with 2,500 members. In December 2000, the country's only synagogue was opened in the Jewish school facility. There are also communities of Muslims, Buddhists, and many other denominations and faiths; however, each of these minority faiths has 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. A few new churches have been built and inaugurated in recent years, including a Methodist church in Tallinn and an Orthodox church, subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, in Narva. Church attendance, which had seen a surge coinciding with the independence movement in the early 1990s, now has decreased significantly. Anecdotal evidence from local Lutheran churches indicates a 76 percent decrease in registered confirmations between 1990 and 2000.

Many groups have sent foreign missionaries into the country in recent years; the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has the largest number of missionaries.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution states that there is no state church, thus establishing the separation of church and state. However, this has not been interpreted strictly in administrative practice. For example, the Churches and Congregations Act decrees that the commanding officer of each military unit shall ensure conscripts the opportunity to practice their religion; however, the coordination of chaplains' services to the prisons is delegated to one of the Lutheran diaconal centers. In response to an order by the Prime Minister, the center carries out this responsibility in a way that does not discriminate against non-Lutherans.

There also are other laws and regulations that directly or indirectly regulate individual and collective freedom of religion. The 1993 law on churches and religious organizations requires that all religious organizations have at least 12 members and register with the Religious Affairs Department under the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MIA). Leaders of religious organizations must be citizens with at least 5 years residence in the country. The minutes of the constitutive meeting, a copy of statutes,

and a notarized copy of three founders' signatures serve as supporting documents to the registration application.

Former President Lennart Meri refused to promulgate a revised law from June 2001 on churches and congregations that contained a provision barring the registry of any church or union of congregations whose permanent or temporary administrative or economic management is performed by a leader or institution situated outside Estonia, declaring, in part, that it constituted an intrusion into the sphere of autonomy of religious institutions. In February 2002, Parliament adopted unanimously a revised Law on Churches and Religious Organizations with amendments, which removed the earlier disputed provision. On February 27, 2002, President Arnold Ruutel promulgated the law. It took effect on July 1, 2002.

On April 17, 2002, the MIA registered the Estonian Orthodox Church, subordinate to Moscow Patriarchate (EOCMP), and ended a series of disputes over the registration of the name the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church. In 1993 the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (EAOC)—independent since 1919, subordinate to Constantinople since 1923, and exiled under the Soviet occupation—reregistered under its 1935 statute. A group of ethnic Russian and Estonian parishes that preferred to remain under the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church structure imposed during the Soviet occupation attempted, unsuccessfully, to claim the EAOC name. In May 2001, the MIA had declined to approve an application by representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate, explaining that it could not formally register this church under its desired name as it would be confused too easily with the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church.

A program of basic Christian ecumenical religious instruction is available in public schools. In primary school parents decide whether their children will participate in these religious studies; at the secondary level, pupils decide if they will attend these classes. Comparative religious studies are available in public and private schools on an elective basis. There are no official statistics on how many students participate in these classes. There are two private church schools that have a religious-based curriculum, both in Tartu.

The property restitution process largely has been completed. The specific details of EOCMP registration have significant implications for which branch of the Orthodox Church may receive legal title to church property. By the end of the reporting period, most church properties, including those being used by the EOCMP, have been under the legal control of the EAOC. Once the EOCMP registered and acquired the legal capacity of a juridical person, it then obtained the right to initiate court proceedings to gain de jure control over the properties that it has used on a de facto basis with the permission of the EAOC. On October 4, 2002, the Government and the two churches concluded a protocol of intentions according to which the EAOC would transfer a part of its property presently used by the EOCMP to the state. The state in turn will lease it to the EOCMP for 50 years. Aleksander Nevski Cathedral is owned by the city of Tallinn and rented out to its Russian Orthodox congregation on a several decade lease basis. According to local Jewish leaders, property restitution is not an issue for the community, as most prewar religious buildings were rented, not owned.

Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Christmas day, Pentecost, and Boxing Day are national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable. Although the majority of citizens are nominally Lutheran, ecumenical services during national days, Christian holidays, or at public events are common. Tension between ethnic Estonian and ethnic Russian populations, which have been on the decline in recent years, generally does not extend to religious matters.

Most of the religious adherents among the country's Russian-speaking population are Orthodox, while the Estonian majority is predominantly Lutheran. There is a deep-seated tradition of tolerance of other denominations and religions. Although

citizens are generally tolerant of new religions and foreign missionaries, some groups that are regarded widely as “cults” cause apprehension.

Two churches were vandalized during the period covered by this report. Earlier thefts of church property prompted the Estonian Council of Churches and the Board of Antiquities to initiate a database of items under protection. The database, which is comprised of digital photos and detailed descriptions, will be shared with law enforcement agencies as needed.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Officials of the U.S. Embassy met regularly during the period covered by this report with appropriate government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and a wide range of figures in religious circles.

FINLAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. According to law, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church are the established state churches.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. However, the court has denied registration to the Finnish Association of Scientologists. In February, the Religious Freedom Act, dating from 1922 was approved by Parliament; it took effect on August 1.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 130,127 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.2 million. The majority of the population belongs to one of the two state churches. Approximately 86 percent are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and 1 percent belong to the Orthodox Church. An additional one percent belong to the Pentecostal Church. Various other non-state religions have approximately 44,000 members. Approximately ten percent of the population do not belong to any religious group. In the past decade, the number of Muslims has grown from 1,000 to approximately 20,000; many of them are immigrants to Finland.

Active members of the state Lutheran Church attend services regularly, participate in small church group activities, and vote in parish elections. However, the majority of church members are only nominal members of the state church and do not participate actively. Their participation occurs mainly during occasions such as holidays, weddings, and funerals. The Lutheran Church estimates that approximately 2 percent of its members attend church services weekly, and 10 percent monthly. The average number of visits to church by church members per year is approximately two.

Nontraditional religious groups freely profess and propagate their beliefs. Such groups as members of Jehovah’s Witnesses and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) have been active in the country for decades. Other groups include the Catholic, Muslim, and Jewish communities.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There are two state churches: the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church. All citizens who belong to one of these state churches pay a church tax as part of their income tax. Those who do not want to pay the tax must inform the applicable state church that they are leaving that church. These church taxes are used to defray the costs of running the state churches. State churches also handle services such as recording births, deaths, and marriages, 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.

Religious groups should have at least 20 members. The purpose of the group should be the public practice of religion, and the activities of the group should be guided by a set of rules. The Government recognizes 45 of these communities as churches.

The new Religious Freedom Act, which was passed in February, also includes regulations on registered religious communities. Their autonomy is increased, and the law on associations is extensively applied to them. As in the old law, a minimum of 20 members is required to form a religious organization. Furthermore, the new law no longer prevents a person from being a member of several religious communities simultaneously. The religious communities will decide independently whether or not their members can belong to other religious communities as well. The one-month reconsideration period and the personal notice of resignation have been abandoned. Resignation can be submitted by mail, and it will take effect immediately upon receipt.

The new law further clarifies that the religious denomination of a child is not automatically determined by the faith observed by the parents: the child's membership of or resignation from a religious community is always based on a separate expression of the will of the parents/guardians, such as baptizing the child. The independence of the child has been increased so that the denomination of a 12-year old may be changed only by permission of the child.

The new law also affects the instruction of religion in schools. A pupil who does not belong to the denomination of the majority of the class attends classes in the subject only by separate registration. The concept of confessional religious instruction in primary and secondary schools is thus replaced by instruction in an individual's personal faith. A pupil continues to have the right of obtaining instruction in the personal faith and is responsible for attending classes in it. Teachers in Evangelical Lutheran Orthodox schools no longer have to be members of a particular church.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on religion. Various government programs available through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor focus on 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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

Some citizens are not very receptive to proselytizing by adherents of nontraditional faiths, in part due to the tendency to regard religion as a private matter.

Nontraditional religious groups practice their religions freely. They generally are free from discrimination despite intolerant attitudes from some members of society.

Immigrants do not encounter difficulties in practicing their faiths; however, they sometimes encounter random discrimination and xenophobia.

The state churches often speak out in support of the Finnish/Nordic welfare state model, couching social welfare state values in religious or moral terms.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy promoting human rights. Embassy representatives periodically meet with representatives of the various religious communities (both mainstream and nontraditional) to discuss religious freedom issues.

FRANCE

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, some religious groups remained concerned about the possible impact of legislation passed in 2001 that tightens restrictions on religious organizations. A 1905 law on the separation of religion and State prohibits discrimination on the basis of faith.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Government has a stated policy of monitoring potentially “dangerous” cult activity through the newly formed Inter-ministerial Monitoring Mission Against Sectarian Abuses.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to freedom of religion. After a dramatic increase in the previous reporting period, available evidence indicates that the number of anti-Semitic incidents was lower during the period covered in this report. Government leaders, religious representatives, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continued to criticize strongly anti-Semitic and racist violence, and the Government maintained increased security for Jewish institutions. The Government continued to take steps to formalize and improve its relations with the country’s large Muslim community.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 211,210 square miles, and its population is approximately 60 million.

The Government does not keep statistics on religious affiliation. The vast majority of the population is nominally Roman Catholic. According to one member of the Catholic hierarchy, only 8 percent of the population are practicing Catholics. Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in number, with approximately 4 to 5 million adherents, or approximately 7 to 8 percent of the population. Protestants make up 2 percent of the population, and the Jewish and Buddhist faiths each represent 1 percent. According to various estimates, approximately 6 percent of the country’s citizens are unaffiliated with any religion.

The Jewish community numbers between 600,000 and 700,000 persons and is divided among Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox groups. According to press reports, up to 60 percent of the Jewish community celebrates at most only the High Holy Days, such as Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. One Jewish community leader has reported that the largest number of practicing Jews in the country is Orthodox.

Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that 250,000 persons attend their services either regularly or periodically.

Orthodox Christians number between 80,000 and 100,000; the vast majority are associated with the Greek or Russian Orthodox Churches.

Other religions present in the country include evangelicals, Christian Scientists, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Membership in evangelical churches is growing due to increased participation by African and Antillian immigrants. According to the press, there are approximately 31,000 declared members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Examples of other minority religious groups include the Church of Scientology with an estimated 5,000 to 20,000 members, the Raelians, the Association of the Triumphant Vajra, and the Order of the Solar Temple.

Foreign missionaries are present in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Religious organizations are not required to register but may do so if they wish to apply for tax-exempt status or to gain official recognition. The Government defines two categories under which religious groups may register: “associations culturelles” (associations of worship, which are exempt from taxes) and “associations culturelles” (cultural associations, which are 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 Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for example, runs strictly religious activities through its association of worship and operates a school under its cultural association.

Religious groups must apply with the local prefecture to be recognized as an association of worship and receive tax-exempt status for their religious activities under the 1905 statute. The prefecture reviews the submitted documentation regarding the association's purpose for existence. To qualify, the group's purpose must be solely the practice of some form of religious ritual. Printing publications, employing a board president, or running a school may disqualify a group from receiving tax-exempt status.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, 109 of 1,138 Protestant associations, 15 of 147 Jewish associations, and 2 of 1,050 Muslim associations have tax-free status. Roughly 100 Catholic associations are tax-exempt; a representative of the Ministry of Interior reports that the number of non-tax-exempt Catholic associations is too numerous to estimate accurately. More than 50 associations of the Jehovah's Witnesses have tax-free status.

According to the 1905 law, associations of worship are not taxed on the donations that they receive. However, the prefecture may decide to review a group's status if the association receives a large donation or legacy that comes to the attention of the tax authorities. If the prefecture determines that the association is not in fact in conformity with the 1905 law, its status may be changed, and it may be required to pay taxes at a rate of 60 percent on present and past donations.

The 2001 About-Picard Law tightens restrictions on associations and provides for the dissolution of groups, including religious groups, under certain conditions. These include: endangering the life or the physical or psychological well-being of a person; placing minors at mortal risk; violation of another person's freedom, dignity, or identity; the illegal practice of medicine or pharmacology; false advertising; and fraud or falsification.

For historical reasons, the Jewish, Lutheran, Reformed (Protestant), and Roman Catholic groups in three departments of Alsace-Lorraine enjoy special legal status in terms of taxation of individuals donating to these religious groups. Adherents of these four religious groups may choose to have a portion of their income tax allocated to their religious organization in a system administered by the central Government.

Central or local governments own and maintain religious buildings constructed before the 1905 law separating religion and State. In Alsace and Moselle, special laws allow the local governments to provide support for the building of religious edifices. The Government partially funded the establishment of the country's oldest Islamic house of worship, the Paris mosque, in 1926.

Foreign missionaries from countries not exempted from visa requirements to enter the country must obtain a 3-month tourist visa before leaving their own country. All missionaries who wish to remain in the country longer than 90 days must obtain visas before entering the country. Upon arrival, missionaries must apply with the local prefecture for a *carte de sejour* (a document that allows a foreigner to remain in the country for a given period of time) and must provide the prefecture a letter from their sponsoring religious organization.

Public schools are secular. Religious instruction is not given in public schools, but religious facts are taught as part of the history curriculum. Parents may home-school children for religious reasons, but all schooling must conform to the standards established for public schools. Public schools make an effort to supply special meals for students with religious dietary restrictions. The State subsidizes private schools, including those that are affiliated with religious organizations.

Of the country's 10 national holidays, 5 are Christian holidays.

The Government has made efforts to promote interfaith understanding. Strict anti-defamation laws prohibit racially or religiously motivated attacks. The Government has programs to combat racism and anti-Semitism through public awareness campaigns and through encouraging dialog between local officials, police, and citizen groups. Government leaders, along with representatives from the Jewish community, the Paris and Marseille Grand Mosques, the Protestant Federation, and the French Conference of Bishops have publicly condemned racist and anti-Semitic violence. In January a law was passed against crimes of a "racist, anti-Semitic, or xenophobic" nature; the law classifies racist motivations for violent acts as aggravating circumstances and mandates harsher punishment for these crimes.

The Government consults with the major religious communities through various formal mechanisms. The Catholic community is represented by the Council of Bishops. In February 2002, the Government and the Vatican initiated a series of meetings that are expected to focus on administrative and judicial matters. The Government announced plans to establish regular consultations with the Church to discuss judicial and administrative issues of concern.

The Protestant Federation of France, established in 1905, comprises 16 churches and 60 associations. Its primary purpose is to contribute to the cohesion of the Protestant community. It also acts as an interlocutor with the Government.

The Central Consistory of Jews of France, established in 1808, comprises the Jewish "cultuelle" worship associations from the entire country. It acts as a liaison with the Government, trains rabbis, and responds to other needs of the Jewish community. In 1943 Jewish members of the French Resistance formed the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France (CRIF). The CRIF's stated purpose is to fight anti-Semitism, affirm its solidarity with Israel and commitment to finding a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict, and preserve the memory of the Holocaust.

In April, the Government assisted the Muslim community in forming the national French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) and 25 regional councils to serve as interlocutors with local and national French officials on such civil-religious issues as mosque construction and certification of "halal" butchers.

The Inter-ministerial Monitoring Mission Against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES) is charged with observing and analyzing sect/cult movements that constitute a threat to public order or that violate French law, coordinating the appropriate responses to abuses by cults, informing the public about potential risks, and helping victims to receive aid.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Following mass suicides in 1994 by members of the Order of the Solar Temple, successive governments have encouraged public caution towards some minority religious groups that it considers "cults." In 1996 a parliamentary commission studying so-called cults issued a report that identified 173 groups as cults, including Jehovah's Witnesses, the Theological Institute of Nimes (an evangelical Christian Bible college), and the Church of Scientology. The Government has not banned any of the groups on the list; however, members of some of the groups listed have alleged instances of intolerance due to the ensuing publicity.

In 1998 the Government created the "Inter-ministerial Mission in the Fight against Sects/Cults" (MILS) to analyze the "phenomenon of cults." The president of MILS resigned in June 2002 under criticism, and an inter-ministerial working group was formed to determine the future parameters of the Government's monitoring of sects/cults. In November the Government announced the formation of MIVILUDES, the successor to MILS. In announcing the formation of MIVILUDES, the Government acknowledged that its predecessor, MILS, had been criticized for certain actions abroad that could have been perceived as contrary to religious freedom. Anti-cult activists have criticized MIVILUDES for being less aggressive than MILS in its approach to sects/cults.

Some observers remained concerned about the 2001 About-Picard Law. By the end of the reporting period, no cases had been brought under the new law. In November 2002, the Council of Europe passed a resolution inviting the Government to reconsider the About-Picard Law and to clarify certain terms in the law, stating that only the European Court of Human Rights could make a determination as to the law's compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights.

In 1989 the Church of Scientology was charged with fraud and the illegal practice of medicine. In 1998 the investigating judge divulged that many of the Government's files on the case were lost. In August 2002, a Paris judge dismissed the case, citing lack of evidence and the expiration of the statute of limitations. Prosecutors later charged the Church of Scientology with the theft of the files; in May, the case was dismissed for lack of evidence by the Grand Tribunal of Paris. In a separate case in May, a Paris judge held a hearing on allegations that the Church of Scientology Celebrity Center had engaged in organized criminal fraud; no decision had been released at the end of the reporting period. Church of Scientology representatives report that a case filed by a parent whose child attended an "Applied Scholastics"-based school remained ongoing.

In 2001 local authorities in La Rochelle and Lorient refused to rent members of Jehovah's Witnesses public space for meetings, citing as a basis for their decision the inclusion of the group in the 1996 parliamentary report on cults. In February and May 2002, administrative tribunals overturned each city's decision, concluding

that the parliamentary report had no legal basis and that the cities could not refuse the group access to public space.

Some observers voiced concerns about the tax authorities' scrutiny of the financial records of some religious groups. In February 2002, the Versailles Court of Appeals upheld a Nanterre court's 2000 decision that the French Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, a cultural association, must pay more than \$47.5 million (45.7 million euros) in back taxes. The plaintiffs' appeal of the decision to the Court of Cassation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The wearing of Muslim headscarves and other religious symbols has provoked public discussion. Debate continues over whether denying some Muslim girls the right to wear headscarves in public schools constitutes a violation of the right to religious freedom. Various courts and government bodies have considered the question on a case-by-case basis; however, there has been no definitive national decision on this issue. Government employees are prohibited from wearing religious symbols at work. A civil servant disciplined in May 2002 for wearing a Muslim headscarf filed suit, and a court decision was pending at the end of the reporting period. Some Muslim groups have protested the government policy prohibiting the wearing of the headscarf in national identity photos. In June, the Paris Court of Appeals upheld a lower court's decision that a telemarketing firm must reinstate an employee who had been illegally fired for refusing to remove her headscarf at work. Government leaders have expressed their commitment to secularism and have indicated their intention to form a working group to study the headscarf issue as part of a larger inquiry into the place of religion in society.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were a number of anti-Semitic incidents during the period covered by this report.

The Council of Christian Churches in France (Conseil des Eglises Chretiens en France) is composed of three Protestant, three Catholic, and three Orthodox Christian representatives. It serves as a forum for dialog among the major Christian churches. There is also an organized interfaith dialog among the Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jewish communities, which discuss and issue statements on various national and international themes.

The annual National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (NCCHR) report on racism and xenophobia, released in March, noted a significant increase in the number of attacks and threats against Jews in 2002. Following a decrease in incidents from 2000 to 2001, anti-Semitic attacks and threats, ranging from graffiti and harassment to cemetery desecration and firebombing, increased dramatically in early 2002, then decreased sharply in May 2002. The NCCHR reported 924 anti-Semitic incidents of violence and threats in 2002, compared to 216 in 2001. The Representative Council of Jewish Institutions of France (CRIF) hotline received 308 reports of anti-Semitic incidents in 2002, ranging from verbal insults and hate mail to physical attacks on people and property. The CRIF hotline received 215 reports of anti-Semitic incidents from January 1 through June 30, compared to 231 during the same period in 2002. Government leaders, members of the religious community, and NGOs strongly criticized the violence, which some linked to increasing tensions in the Middle East. It appeared that disaffected youths were responsible for many of the incidents, and some arrests were made.

The Government increased security for Jewish institutions. More than 13 mobile units, totaling more than 1,200 police officers, have been assigned to those locales having the largest Jewish communities. Fixed or mobile police are present in the schools, particularly during the hours when children are entering or leaving school buildings. All of these measures were coordinated closely with leaders of the Jewish communities in the country, notably the CRIF. In April 2002, the Marseille prefecture instituted 24-hour patrols at all of the city's Jewish sites.

In addition several incidents occurred against members of the large Arab/Muslim community, including incidents of harassment and vandalism.

Panda Software has claimed that critical statements by government officials in press articles linking the product to Scientology have caused a significant loss of business.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Representatives from the Embassy have met several times with government officials and Members of Parliament. Embassy officers also meet regularly with a variety of private citizens, religious organizations, and NGOs involved in the issue. U.S. Members of Congress and Congressional Commissions, as well as Congressional staff members, also have discussed religious freedom issues with senior government officials.

GEORGIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, local authorities sometimes restricted the rights of members of nontraditional religious minority groups.

The status of religious freedom remained poor; however, the Government took some positive steps to protect religious freedom and combat violence directed at minority religions. Attacks on religious minorities, including violence, seizure of religious literature, and disruption of services and meetings, continued with near impunity during the period covered by this report. Local police and security officials failed to protect nontraditional religious minority groups and were complicit in several attacks against members of such groups. Police often failed to respond to continued attacks by Orthodox extremists, largely followers of excommunicated Orthodox priest Father Basil Mkalavishvili, against members of Jehovah's Witnesses and other nontraditional religious minorities.

Citizens generally do not interfere with traditional religious groups, such as Orthodox, Muslims, or Jews; however, there is widespread suspicion of nontraditional religious groups, and the number of incidents in which Orthodox extremists harassed and attacked such groups, especially members of Jehovah's Witnesses, continued to increase. Polls indicated that a majority of citizens believe minority religious groups are detrimental for the state and consider violence against such groups acceptable.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government repeatedly raised its concerns about harassment and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with President Shevardnadze, senior government officials, and Members of Parliament (M.P.s).

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 25,900 square miles and its population is approximately 4.4 million. Most ethnic Georgians (more than 70 percent of the population, according to the results of the 2002 census) nominally associate themselves with the Georgian Orthodox Church. Orthodox churches serving other non-Georgian ethnic groups, such as Russians, Armenians, and Greeks, are subordinate to the Georgian Orthodox Church. Non-Georgian Orthodox Churches generally use the language of their communicants. In addition, there are a small number of mostly ethnic Russian adherents from two dissident Orthodox schools: The Molokani Staroveriy (Old Believers) and Dukhoboriy, the majority of whom have left the country. Under Soviet rule, the number of active churches and priests declined sharply and religious education was nearly nonexistent. Membership in the Georgian Orthodox Church has continued to increase since independence in 1991. The Church maintains 4 theological seminaries, 2 academies, several schools, and 27 church dioceses; and has 700 priests, 250 monks, and 150 nuns. The Church is headed by Catholicos Patriarch, Ilya II; the Patriarchate is located in Tbilisi.

Several religions, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam, traditionally have coexisted with Georgian Orthodoxy. A large number of Armenians live in the southern Javakheti region, in which they constitute a majority of the population. Islam is prevalent among Azerbaijani and northern Caucasus ethnic communities in the eastern part of the country and also is found in the regions of Ajara and Abkhazia. Approximately 5 percent of the population is nominally Muslim. Judaism, which has been present since ancient times, is practiced in a number of communities throughout the country, especially in the largest cities of Tbilisi and Kutaisi.

Approximately 8,000 Jews remain in the country, following 2 large waves of emigration, the first in the early 1970s and the second in the period of perestroika during the late 1980s. Before then, Jewish officials estimate there were as many as 100,000 Jews in the country. There also are small numbers of Lutheran worshipers, mostly among descendants of German communities that first settled in the country several hundred years ago. A small number of Kurdish Yezidis have lived in the country for centuries.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Protestant denominations have become more active and prominent. They include Baptists (composed of Russian, Georgian, Armenian, Ossetian, and Kurdish groups); Seventh-day Adventists; Pentecostals (both Georgian and Russian); members of Jehovah's Witnesses (local representatives state that the group has been in the country since 1953 and has approximately 15,000 adherents); the New Apostolic Church; and the Assemblies of God. The Church of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) has not yet sent missionaries to the country, and the number of Mormons in the country is very small. There also are a few Bahá'ís and Hare Krishnas. Except for Jehovah's Witnesses, membership numbers on these groups are generally not available; however, the membership of all these groups combined is most likely fewer than 100,000 persons.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the central Government generally respects this right in practice; however, local officials, police, and security officials at times harassed nontraditional religious minority groups and their foreign missionaries. The Constitution recognizes the special role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the country's history but also stipulates the independence of the Church from the State. A Constitutional Agreement between the Government and the Georgian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (referred to as the Concordat) was signed and ratified by Parliament in October 2002. The Concordat recognizes the special role of the Georgian Orthodox Church and devolves authority over all religious matters to it.

There are no laws regarding the registration of religious organizations; however, the Ministry of Justice prepared and submitted to Parliament a draft bill on religion that provides for registration of all religious confessions in the country. A parliamentary committee debated the bill and returned it for revision in 2002. The Government revised the bill but did not resubmit it to Parliament by the end of the reporting period. The Ambassador has advised parliamentary leaders of the importance of vetting this draft legislation with the appropriate commissions of the Council of Europe and of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Religious groups that perform humanitarian services may be registered as charitable organizations, although religious and other organizations may perform humanitarian services without registration. Organizations that are not registered may not rent office space or import literature, among other activities. Individual members of unregistered organizations may engage in these activities as individuals, but in such cases are exposed to personal legal liability.

The President, State Minister, the National Security Council's Secretary and human rights representative, and the Government Ombudsman have been effective advocates for religious freedom and have made numerous public speeches and appearances in support of minority religious groups. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and Procuracy in isolated instances have become proactive in the protection of religious freedom but generally have failed to pursue criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their continued attacks against religious minorities. In February an Office of Human Rights was established in the Procuracy that is charged with protecting religious freedom, including investigating the conduct of the prosecutor and judge in the Mkalishvili trial. The Ministry of Internal Affairs created a post of Deputy Minister with special responsibility for religious freedom matters and for investigating religious violence. The Minister also issued a special order protecting religious freedom, after which incidents of police participation in religious violence decreased. On the few occasions in which investigations into religious violence have been opened, they have proceeded very slowly.

During the Soviet era, the Georgian Orthodox Church largely was suppressed, as were many other religious institutions; many churches were destroyed or turned into museums, concert halls, and other secular establishments. As a result of policies regarding religion implemented by the Soviet government in the late 1980s, the present Patriarch began reconsecrating churches formerly closed throughout the country. The Church remains very active in the restoration of these religious facili-

ties and lobbies the Government for the return of properties that were held by the Church before the Bolshevik Revolution. (Church authorities have claimed that 20 to 30 percent of the land at one time belonged to the Church.)

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Georgian Orthodox Church enjoys a tax-exempt status not available to other religious groups and lobbied Parliament and the Government for laws that would grant it special status and restrict the activities of missionaries from nontraditional religions. On October 22, 2002, Parliament ratified the Constitutional Agreement between the Church and the State that defined relations between the two. The Concordat included several controversial articles, including approval authority over all religious literature and construction (Article 6.6); transfer to Church ownership of church treasures expropriated during the Soviet period and held in state museums and repositories; government compensation to the Church for moral and material damage inflicted by the Soviets; and government assistance in establishing Orthodox chaplaincies in the military and in prisons. The Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, and Armenian Apostolic churches, as well as representatives of the Jewish and Muslim faiths, signed formal documents with the Orthodox Patriarchate agreeing to the Concordat, but stated after the document was published that Article 6.6 was not in the original. Representatives of nontraditional religious minority groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals, were not included in the Concordat process. Following ratification, the True Orthodox Church, a schismatic Orthodox group, applied to the Constitutional Court claiming Article 6.6 would violate their freedom of religion. The Court declined to consider the case on the grounds that no discrimination had yet occurred. The Catholic Church has also raised concerns about the authority the Orthodox Church enjoys over decisions regarding the return of its historical church property.

While most citizens practice their religion without restriction, the worship of some, particularly members of nontraditional faiths, has been restricted by threats, intimidation, and the use of force by ultra-conservative extremists whom the Government has failed to control. At times local police and security officials harassed several non-Orthodox religious groups, particularly local and foreign missionaries, including members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Hare Krishnas. Some nationalist politicians continue to use the issue of the supremacy of the Georgian Orthodox Church in their platforms and criticized some Protestant groups, especially evangelical groups, as subversive. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses in particular are the target of attacks from such politicians, most prominently M.P. Guram Sharadze.

A 2001 Supreme Court ruling revoking the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses, on the grounds that the law does not allow for registration of religious organizations, continues to restrict the group's ability to rent premises for services and import literature. The revocation of the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses resulted from a 1999 court case brought by M.P. Sharadze seeking to ban the group on the grounds that it presented a threat to the State and the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Supreme Court emphasized that its ruling was based on technical legal grounds and was not to have the effect of banning the group; however, many local law enforcement officials interpreted the ruling as a ban and have used it as a justification not to protect members of Jehovah's Witnesses from attacks by religious extremists. In March the Customs Administration relied on this decision to seize literature imported by the Jehovah's Witnesses; the material was released in August under pressure from foreign ambassadors. The court decision did not have the effect of revoking the registration of other religious organizations, since the case was brought against Jehovah's Witnesses only.

The Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches have been unable to secure the return of their churches and other facilities closed during the Soviet period, many of which later were given to the Georgian Orthodox Church by the State. The Georgian Orthodox Church attempted to take over a 19th century Catholic Church in Gori, a process that was halted only by a presidential decree. A prominent Armenian Church in Tbilisi remained closed, and the Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches, as with Protestant denominations, have had difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches due to pressure from the Georgian Orthodox Church. Attempts to open True Orthodox Churches in several locations and a new Armenian Church in Chiatura failed due to opposition from the Georgian Orthodox Church.

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and Procuracy generally failed to pursue criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their attacks against religious minorities. On the few occasions in which there were investigations into such attacks, they have proceeded very slowly.

The Jewish community also experienced delays in the return of property confiscated during Soviet rule. By the end of the period covered by this report, a theater group still had not vacated the central hall of a former synagogue that the Government rented to it, despite a 2001 Supreme Court ruling instructing it to do so.

The Georgian Orthodox Church routinely reviews religious and other textbooks used in schools for consistency with Orthodox beliefs. Suggestions by the Church are almost always incorporated into textbooks prior to issue. By law, the Church has a consultative role in curriculum development but has no veto power.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On occasion local police and security officials continued to deny protection or harass nontraditional religious minority groups, especially members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The police only sporadically intervened to protect such minorities from attacks by Orthodox extremists. Police participation or facilitation of attacks diminished during the reporting period. The Catholic Church continued to face difficulties in attempting to build churches in the towns of Kutaisi and Akhaltsikhe.

Since 1999, followers of excommunicated Orthodox priest Basili Mkalavishvili (Basilists) have engaged in numerous violent attacks on nontraditional religious minorities, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and especially members of Jehovah's Witnesses. During the period covered by this report, the Basilists, as well as members of another Orthodox extremist group called "Jvari" (Cross), continued their series of attacks, at times together. The attacks involved seizing religious literature, preventing and breaking up religious gatherings, and beating parishioners, in some cases with nail-studded sticks and clubs. The attacks have been publicized widely, in part by the Basilists themselves who videotape the incidents. All acts of religious violence have gone unpunished, despite the filing of more than 750 criminal complaints. The long-delayed trial of Mkalavishvili and Petre Ivanidze for violence directed at members of Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists opened on October 25, 2002, after a foreign government intervened with authorities. Their supporters physically attacked an OSCE observer and in several cases physically threatened foreign diplomats who attended the trial. The proceedings were delayed in May due to the inability of the Government to maintain security and order in the courtroom. On June 6, a Tbilisi court ordered Mkalavishvili taken into custody for 3 months of preventive detention. Law enforcement authorities claimed they could not locate him to serve the warrant, although the press was able to do so repeatedly. Due to the trial and preventive detention order, Mkalavishvili has not participated in most attacks; however, evidence strongly suggests that Mkalavishvili continues to direct attacks. Following the issuance of the detention order, Mkalavishvili reportedly fled the country and now resides abroad. A warrant for his arrest is outstanding.

During the reporting period, there were numerous attacks on members of nontraditional religions, especially Jehovah's Witnesses. Often mobs of supporters of Mkalavishvili and M.P. Sharadze threatened and physically abused members at meetings for worship, prevented such meetings, and destroyed religious literature and property, such as the private homes where the meetings often took place. During the period covered by this report, Basilists continued to harass several families of Jehovah's Witnesses, demanding that they stop holding meetings in their homes. Because of the continuing violence, the Jehovah's Witnesses have refrained from public meetings in favor of gatherings in private homes. Authorities rarely investigated the perpetrators, even if the victims filed criminal complaints.

On January 24, a mob led by Mkalavishvili blocked the Baptist Cathedral in Tbilisi to prevent an ecumenical prayer service to which foreign diplomats had been invited. The mob damaged the building, seized and destroyed literature, and assaulted several participants. The police intervened to prevent further violence but did nothing to protect the property or allow the congregation to enter. On March 14, the ecumenical service was held without incident. President Shevardnadze attended, along with government officials and the diplomatic community, and made a statement on the importance of protecting religious freedom.

On May 4, a mob led by M.P. Sharadze blocked the road to Gori and prevented a planned meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses. Police had previously urged the Jehovah's Witnesses to cancel the meeting and did not intervene to provide freedom of movement.

On June 8, an ultra-Orthodox mob blocked the street in front of the Pentecostal minister's house where services are conducted and refused to let parishioners through. Church members were threatened with violence. Police were present but did not allow the parishioners to enter the street. The mob continued to maintain this blockade at the end of the reporting period.

On June 15, a Baptist Church in Akhalsopheli was burned down in an apparent arson incident. Although an investigation was requested, it had not begun at the

end of the reporting period. On June 22, attendees of a special service held in the burned Church included Minister of Internal Affairs, Secretary of the National Security Council, and foreign ambassadors.

In August 2002, a mob burned a Jehovah's Witnesses meeting site in Kaspi, destroying literature and property. Ultra-Orthodox extremists from the Jvari group, assisted by M.P. Sharadze, blocked the road and prevented the congress from taking place. Authorities were notified but did nothing to provide protection for the members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and police actively colluded with the attackers.

On September 24, 2002, a mob armed with sticks and bottles attacked a True Orthodox parish in Shemokmedi, injuring several parishioners and damaging a building.

In late September 2002, mobs beat members and destroyed literature at meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses in separate attacks throughout the country. On September 26, 2002, an armed mob, which according to eyewitnesses was led by the local mayor, attacked a Jehovah's Witnesses' gathering in Napareuli. One member was beaten unconscious, religious literature was destroyed, and the home was ransacked. In each case, local police declined to intervene and no action was taken on the criminal complaints that victims filed.

On October 7, 2002, a follower of Mkalavishvili attacked a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses on the street in Tbilisi. The police took the victim to the police substation and began to verbally and physically abuse him and allowed his attacker to beat him in their presence.

On November 18, 2002, during the trial of Mkalavishvili, a mob of his supporters threatened and physically expelled from the courtroom a reporter from Radio Free Liberty/Radio Europe who was covering the proceedings and verbally threatened an observer from a foreign embassy. Police were present in the court but did not intervene.

An investigation into the results of the Basilists' attack on a September 2000 Congress of Jehovah's Witnesses in Marneuli remained ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Customs and police officials sometimes seized literature of nontraditional religions, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses. On January 8, a shipment of Jehovah's Witnesses literature was seized at the Natakhtari police station and was released 10 days later. On March 10 and April 10, Customs in Poti seized a shipment of Jehovah's Witnesses' literature on the grounds that the organization's registration had been revoked and it could not legally import literature. On December 6, 2002, police stopped a truck belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses transporting a shipment of literature and held the truck until the arrival of Mkalavishvili and his supporters, who assaulted the driver and stole his documents. Police did not intervene and impounded the truck and shipment. On December 12, after the intervention of a foreign embassy, police released the materials to the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Regular and reliable information regarding the separatist controlled "Republic of Abkhazia," which no country recognizes and over which the Government of Georgia does not exercise control, is difficult to obtain. A 1995 decree by the Abkhaz "President," Vladislav Ardzinba, that banned Jehovah's Witnesses in Abkhazia remains in effect. A number of members of Jehovah's Witnesses have been detained in the last few years; however, according to a representative of Jehovah's Witnesses, none were in detention at the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The public's attitude towards religion is ambivalent, according to numerous public opinion polls. Although many residents are not particularly observant religiously, the link between Georgian Orthodoxy and Georgian ethnic and national identity is strong.

Despite their genuine and historical tolerance toward minority religious groups traditional to the country—including Catholics, Armenian Apostolic Christians, Jews, and Muslims—many citizens remain apprehensive about Protestants and other nontraditional religions, which they view as taking advantage of the populace's economic hardship by gaining membership through economic assistance to converts. Some members of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the public, including M.P. Sharadze, view religious minorities, especially nontraditional groups of evan-

gical Protestants or so-called “sects,” as a threat to the national Church and the country’s cultural values. Nationalistic politicians manipulated reports of the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in order to create public hostility. In a signed document, 11 leaders of the Georgian Orthodox Church have argued that Christian missionaries should confine their activities to non-Christian areas. Religious leaders of different faiths have spoken out against such criticism.

The Georgian Orthodox Church withdrew its membership from the World Council of Churches in 1997 in order to appease clerics strongly opposed to ecumenism. The Patriarchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church has strongly criticized the attacks perpetrated by Orthodox extremists against nontraditional religious minorities and has distanced itself from Mkalavishvili. However, Georgian Orthodox Church officials have had ties to the Jvari organization, which has committed numerous acts of violence against religious minorities. Following the June 15 destruction of the Baptist Church in Akhalsopheli, the Orthodox Bishop in Rustavi contacted the Baptist Bishop to say he had withdrawn his support of the Jvari organization. The Orthodox Bishop had been one of the founders of Jvari.

In July 2002, Catholics on a pilgrimage to Saint Nino’s grave were assaulted near Sanavardo in the Eastern region. Pilgrims were verbally harassed and physically pushed and shoved. The pilgrimage was cancelled due to the threats and imminent danger.

On October 6, 2002, a mob destroyed the True Orthodox Church under construction in Shemokmedi.

Many of the problems among traditional religious groups stem from disputes over property. The Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches have been unable to secure the return of their churches and other facilities that were closed during the Soviet period, many of which later were given to the Georgian Orthodox Church by the State. A prominent Armenian church in Tbilisi remains closed and the Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches, with Protestant denominations, have had difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches, reportedly in part as a result of pressure from the Georgian Orthodox Church. Georgian Orthodox Church authorities have accused Armenian believers of purposely altering some existing Georgian churches so that they would be mistaken for Armenian churches. The Catholic Church successfully completed the construction of a new church in Batumi in 2000.

The Muslim and Jewish communities report that they have encountered few societal problems. There is no historical pattern of anti-Semitism in the country, nor have there been recently reported incidents of this sort.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government repeatedly raised its concerns regarding harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with senior government officials, including the President, Parliament Speaker, Internal Affairs and Justice Ministers, and the Prosecutor General. In October 2002, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, the Chairperson of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, strongly criticized unpunished religious violence in the country and called upon the Government to prosecute vigorously extremists who have attacked nontraditional religious minorities. On March 11, Senator Nighthorse Campbell reiterated his concern, and on April 3 Co-Chairman Senator Christopher Smith expressed support for President Shevardnadze’s March 14 statement condemning religious violence but called on the Government to take more active measures. Embassy attendance at the trial of Mkalavishvili was instrumental in its moving forward. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, frequently met with representatives of the Government, Parliament, various religious confessions, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with religious freedom issues.

In May, a visiting official from the Department of State met with members of the Government, various religious confessions, and NGOs concerned with religious freedom issues and underscored the need for the Government to end religious violence.

GERMANY

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, discrimination against minority religious groups remains an issue.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Government does not recognize Scientology as a religion, viewing it instead as an economic enterprise; federal and state classification of Scientology as a potential threat to democratic order has led to employment and commercial discrimination against Scientologists in both the public and private sectors. The Government extended its immigration exclusion (refusal to issue a visitor visa) against the leaders of the Unification Church, Reverend and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, based upon the Government's view of the Church as a "cult." A federal court upheld a ban on the wearing of Muslim headscarves by teachers in public schools.

The generally amicable relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of minority religions, including Scientologists, reported an improving climate of tolerance. Government officials have begun for the first time to talk directly with Scientologists and have granted the Church of Scientology partial tax-exempt status. However, the state governments of Bavaria and Hamburg have proposed new measures to limit Scientologists' activities, and the Lutheran Church has continued its information campaign against Scientology and other alleged "cults." These actions contributed to persistent negative public attitudes toward members of minority religions.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 137,821 square miles, and its population is approximately 82 million. There are no official statistics on religions; however, unofficial estimates and figures provided by the organizations themselves give an approximate breakdown of the membership of the country's denominations. The Evangelical Church, which includes the Lutheran, Uniate, and Reformed Protestant Churches, has 27 million members, who constitute 33 percent of the population. Statistical offices in the Evangelical Church estimate that 1.1 million members (4 percent of the membership) attend weekly religious services. The Catholic Church has a membership of 27.2 million, or 33.4 percent of the population. According to the Church's statistics, 4.8 million Catholics (17.5 percent of the membership) actively participate in weekly services. According to government estimates, there are approximately 2.8 to 3.2 million Muslims living in the country (approximately 3.4 percent to 3.9 percent of the population). Statistics on mosque attendance were not available.

Orthodox churches have approximately 1.1 million members, or 1.3 percent of the population. The Greek Orthodox Church is the largest, with approximately 450,000 members; the Romanian Orthodox Church has 300,000 members; and the Serbian Orthodox Church has 200,000 members. The Russian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate has 50,000 members, while the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad has approximately 28,000 members. The Syrian Orthodox Church has 37,000 members, and the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church has an estimated 35,000 members.

Other Christian churches have approximately 1 million members, or 1.2 percent of the population. These include Adventists with 35,000 members, the Apostolate of Jesus Christ with 18,000 members, the Apostolate of Judah with 2,800 members, the Apostolic Community with 8,000 members, Baptists with 87,000 members, the Christian Congregation with 12,000 members, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) with 39,000 members, the Evangelical Brotherhood with 7,200 members, Jehovah's Witnesses with 165,000 members, Mennonites with 6,500 members, Methodists with 66,000 members, the New Apostolic Church with 430,000 members, Old Catholics with 25,000 members, the Salvation Army with 2,000 members, Seventh-day Adventists with 53,000 members, the Union of Free Evangelical Churches with 30,500 members, the Union of Free Pentecostal Communities with 16,000 members, the Temple Society with 250 members, and the Quakers with 335 members.

Jewish congregations have approximately 87,500 members and make up 0.1 percent of the population. According to press reports, the country's Jewish population is growing rapidly; more than 100,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union have come to the country since 1990, with smaller numbers arriving from other countries as well. Not all new arrivals join congregations, resulting in the discrepancy between population numbers and the number of congregation members.

The Unification Church has approximately 850 members; the Church of Scientology has 6,000 members; Hare Krishna has 5,000 members; the Johannish Church has 3,500 members; the International Grail Movement has 2,300 members; Ananda Marga has 3,000 members; and Sri Chinmoy has 300 members.

Approximately 21.8 million persons, or 26.6 percent of the population, either have no religious affiliation or belong to unrecorded religious organizations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law (Constitution) provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, discrimination against minority religious groups remains an issue.

Religion and State are separate, although historically a special partnership exists between the State and those religious communities that have the status of a "corporation under public law." If they fulfill certain requirements, including assurance of permanence, size of the organization, and no indication that the organization is not loyal to the State, religious organizations may request that they be granted "public law corporation" status, which among other things, entitles them to levy taxes on their members that the State collects for them. Organizations pay a fee to the Government for this service, and not all public law corporations avail themselves of this privilege. The decision to grant public law corporation status is made at the state level. In 2000 the Federal Constitutional Court passed a groundbreaking ruling in which it found the condition of "loyalty to the State" to be a violation of the constitutionally mandated separation of religion and State. Therefore this condition is inadmissible in the catalog of conditions imposed on religious organizations. Many religious groups have been granted public law corporation status. Among them are the Lutheran and Catholic Churches, as well as the Jewish community, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Mennonites, Baptists, Methodists, Christian Scientists, and the Salvation Army.

The State provides subsidies to some religious organizations for historical and cultural reasons. Some Jewish synagogues have been built with state financial assistance because of the State's role in the destruction of synagogues in 1938 and throughout the Nazi period. Repairs to and restoration of some Christian churches and monasteries are undertaken with state financial support because of the expropriation by the State of church lands in 1803 during the Napoleonic period. Having taken from the churches the means by which they earned money to repair their buildings, the State recognized an obligation to cover the cost of those repairs. Subsidies are paid out only to those buildings affected by the 1803 Napoleonic reforms. Newer buildings do not receive subsidies for maintenance. State governments also subsidize various institutions affiliated with public law corporations, such as religious schools and hospitals.

In January, the Government signed a "State Agreement on Cooperation" with the Central Council of Jews, allowing the Jewish community, along with Lutherans and Catholics, to have such an agreement for cooperation "in all areas that affect the public good and which fall under the authority of the Federal Government." Parliament later ratified the Agreement. According to the Agreement, approximately \$3,396,300 (3 million euros) will be provided annually to the Central Council of Jews, which in turn will provide the Government with an annual report on the use of the funds. The Agreement emphasizes that the Central Council of Jews is open to all branches of Judaism.

Religious organizations are not required to register. Most religious organizations are registered and treated as nonprofit associations, which enjoy tax-exempt status. State-level authorities review registration submissions and routinely grant tax-exempt status. Organizations must register at a local or municipal court and provide evidence, through their own statutes, that they are a religion and thus contribute socially, spiritually, or materially to society. Local tax offices occasionally conduct reviews of tax-exempt status. Following legal action by the Church of Scientology, which challenged the Government's refusal to grant the Church the tax-exempt status enjoyed by other religious communities, a Cologne court compelled the Finance Ministry to grant the Church an exemption from taxes on license fees paid to U.S.-based Church of Scientology organizations for copyrighted materials.

Most public schools offer religious instruction in cooperation with the Protestant and Catholic churches and offer instruction in Judaism if enough students express interest. A nonreligious ethics course or study hall generally is available for students not wishing to participate in religious instruction. The issue of Islamic education in public schools has become topical in several states. In 2000 the Federal Administrative Court upheld previous court rulings that the Berlin Islamic Federation qualified as a religious community and as a result must be given the opportunity to provide religious instruction in Berlin schools. The decision drew criticism from the many Islamic organizations not represented by the Berlin Islamic Federation, and the Berlin State Government expressed its concerns about the Islamic Fed-

eration's alleged links to Milli Gorus, a Turkish group classified as extremist by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC). However, after another court decision in favor of the Islamic Federation in August 2001, Berlin school authorities decided to allow the Islamic Federation to begin teaching Islamic religious classes in several Berlin schools starting in September 2001. In 2000 Bavaria announced that it intended to offer German-language Islamic education in its public schools starting in 2003.

In July, the Berlin State Government approved the offering of Buddhist religious education in public schools by the Berlin Buddhist Society, a member of the German Buddhist Union. Under Berlin's public education system, 90 percent of the cost of approved religious education, as well as provision of facilities, is publicly funded.

The right to provide religious chaplaincies in the military, in hospitals, and in prisons is not dependent on the public law corporation status of a religious community. The Ministry of Defense was considering the possibility of Islamic clergymen providing religious services in the military, although none of the many Islamic communities has the status of a corporation under public law.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

In August 2002, the Federal Interior Ministry extended its immigration exclusion (refusal to issue a visitor visa) against the founder of the Unification Church, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, and his wife, Hak Ja Har Moon. The couple have been refused entry to the country (and through Schengen Treaty visa ineligibility, to other Schengen countries as well) since 1995, when the Chief Office for Border Security issued a notice of refusal of entry for an initial period of 3 years. The Government refused entry based on its characterization of Reverend Moon and his wife as leaders of a "cult" that endangers the personal and social development of young persons. Citing this original justification, the Government extended its refusal of entry for another 2 years in August 2002 and was the only Schengen country to do so. The Unification Church asserts that Reverend and Mrs. Moon's personal presence at certain ceremonies is a crucial part of the Church's doctrine and has sought legal remedies to the refusal of entry. However, federal courts have ruled that the exclusion does not infringe upon church members' freedom to practice their religion.

In 1997 the Federal Administrative Court in Berlin upheld the Berlin State Government's decision to deny Jehovah's Witnesses public law corporation status. The court concluded that the group did not offer the "indispensable loyalty" towards the democratic state "essential for lasting cooperation" because it forbade its members from participating in public elections. The group does enjoy the basic tax-exempt status afforded to most religious organizations. In 2000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses appealed, and the Constitutional Court found in their favor, remanding the case back to the Federal Administrative Court in Berlin. For the first time, the Constitutional Court had examined the conditions for granting the status of a public law corporation and found that for reasons of the separation of religion and State, "loyalty to the State" cannot be a condition imposed on religious communities. The Constitutional Court tempered the victory for Jehovah's Witnesses by instructing the Berlin Administrative Court to examine whether Jehovah's Witnesses use coercive methods to prevent their members from leaving the congregation and whether their child-rearing practices conform to the country's human rights standards. In May 2001, the Federal Administrative Court referred the case back down to the Higher Administrative Court in Berlin to address the open questions. The Higher Administrative Court had not yet decided the case at the end of the period covered by this report and gave no indication that it intends to take action to decide the case in the near future.

The Church of Scientology, which operates 18 churches and missions, remained under scrutiny by both federal and state officials, who contend that its ideology is opposed to the democratic constitutional order. Since 1997 Scientology has been under observation by the federal and state OPCs. In observing an organization, OPC officials seek to collect information, mostly from written materials and firsthand accounts, to assess whether a "threat" exists. More intrusive methods would be subject to legal checks and would require evidence of involvement in treasonous or terrorist activity. Federal OPC authorities stated that no requests had been made to employ more intrusive methods nor were any such requests expected.

Within the federal system, the states showed large differences with respect to their treatment of the Church of Scientology. Two states, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, did not monitor Scientology, stating that Scientology does not have an actively aggressive attitude towards the Constitution, the condition required by the states' laws to permit OPC observation. Bavaria, on the other hand,

announced in November 2002 that it may seek to ban Scientology based on recommendations of a report and indicated that it would ask the Federal Interior Ministry to consider a federal ban. Bavaria has cited medical malpractice associated with Scientology's "auditing" techniques as one possible basis for the ban. At a convention of state interior ministers in March, Bavaria found no support among other states, except for Hamburg, for the idea of a ban against Scientology. Other organizations under OPC observation are right-wing extremist, left-wing extremist, or foreign extremist and terrorist groups; Scientology is the only religious community under OPC observation, and Scientologists contend that inclusion in the list of totalitarian and terrorist groups is harmful to the Church's reputation.

The federal OPC's annual report for 2002 concluded that the original reasons for initiating observation of Scientology in 1997 remained valid but noted that Scientology had not been involved in any criminal activity. When the issue of OPC observation was discussed at the annual gathering of state interior ministers in Bremen in December 2002, the ministers also acknowledged that Scientology had not been involved in illegal activities.

Several states have published pamphlets detailing the ideology and practices of minority religions. States defend the practice by noting their responsibility to respond to citizens' requests for information about these groups. While many of the pamphlets are factual and relatively unbiased, some groups fear that inclusion in a report covering known dangerous cults or movements could harm their reputations. Scientology is the focus of many such pamphlets, some of which warn of alleged dangers posed by Scientology to the political order and free market economic system and to the mental and financial wellbeing of individuals. The Hamburg OPC published "The Intelligence Service of the Scientology Organization," which outlines its claim that Scientology tried to infiltrate governments, offices, and companies and that the Church spies on its opponents, defames them, and "destroys" them. The Bavarian State Government funded a report published in November 2002 that warned of alleged dangers posed by the religion and recommended further restriction of the Church's activities. The Hamburg State Parliament passed a resolution in April encouraging the State Government to back Bavaria's position.

In January, the Hamburg Administrative Court ruled for the Church of Scientology Germany and the Church of Scientology Hamburg against the City of Hamburg and the Hamburg Ministry of Interior. In a public decision, the court issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting the Interior Ministry from allowing Ursula Caberta, head of the Ministry's "Working Group Scientology," from repeating certain public statements of a false and derogatory character about the Church. The court criticized the Interior Ministry for its failure to reprimand Caberta for violating her duty of neutrality as a government employee by accepting a personal loan of \$75,000 (approximately 66,250 euros) with no terms of repayment from a private individual funding anti-Scientology litigation. An earlier criminal investigation into this matter resulted in Caberta being fined approximately \$8,490 (7,500 euros) in June 2002; however, the Hamburg Interior Ministry made no requirement that she pay back the \$75,000 loan.

Until 2001, the Government required firms bidding on government contracts to sign a declaration stating that neither the firm's management nor its employees were Scientologists. In March 2001, the Economics Ministry persuaded the federal and state interior ministries to accept new wording that would only prohibit use of the "technology of L. Ron Hubbard" in executing government contracts. Firms owned, managed by, or employing Scientologists could bid on these contracts. The private sector on occasion required foreign firms that wished to do business in the country to declare any affiliation that they or their employees may have with Scientology. Private sector firms that screen for Scientology affiliations frequently cited OPC observation of Scientology as a justification for discrimination. The Federal Property Office barred the sale of some real estate to Scientologists, noting that the Finance Ministry had urged that such sales be avoided if possible.

Since 1996 employment offices throughout the country have implemented an Economics and Labor Ministry administrative order directing them to enter an "S" notation next to the names of firms suspected of employing Scientologists. Employment counselors are supposed to warn their clients that they might encounter Scientologists in these workplaces. Scientologists have claimed that the "S" notations violate their right to privacy and interfere with their livelihood.

Scientologists continued to report instances of societal discrimination; however, there were fewer incidents during the period covered in this report than in previous reporting periods. Bavaria required applicants for state civil service positions to complete questionnaires detailing any relationship they may have with Scientology. Currently employed civil servants were not required to provide this information. The questionnaire specifically stated that the failure to complete the form would re-

sult in the employment application not being considered. However, previous court cases have ruled in favor of employees who have refused. According to Bavarian and federal officials, no one in Bavaria lost a job or was denied employment solely because of association with Scientology; Scientology officials confirmed this. A number of state and local offices shared information on individuals known to be Scientologists. There were numerous reports from Scientologists that they were denied banking services when the account was to be opened under the name of the Church of Scientology and that they were denied the right to rent facilities to hold meetings and seminars.

In April, after a year of legal proceedings, the Bavarian Supreme Administrative Court upheld Munich's refusal to issue a permit to the Church of Scientology to conduct a 1-day exhibition in the city's Odeonplatz. In their decision, the judges stated that they were not convinced that Scientology was a religious community.

A July 2002 ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court clarified the Government's "warning" function with respect to nontraditional religions. In a case pending since the 1980s involving the "Bagwan/Osho Spiritual Movement," the Court ruled that the Government is allowed to characterize such nontraditional religions as "sects," "youth religions," and "youth sects" and is allowed to provide accurate information about them to the public; however, the Government is not allowed to defame them by using terms such as "destructive," "pseudo-religion," or "manipulative."

In June 2002, an administrative court upheld a 1998 ban in the southern state of Baden-Wuerttemberg on Muslim teachers wearing headscarves in the classroom. In July 2002, the Federal Administrative Court affirmed the lower court's ruling. A Muslim teacher affected by the ruling appealed the decision to the Federal Constitutional Court, which held its first reading of the case in May, the first time the country's highest court has considered this issue. A decision is expected by the end of 2003. Muslim students remain free to wear headscarves in the classroom.

The Government banned the Evangelical Christian DeMoss Foundation's television and radio broadcasts, as well as its billboards, based upon the official prohibition of broadcast advertising for religious, political, or ideological causes.

Difficulties sometimes arise between religious groups and the State over tax matters and zoning approval for building places of worship.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

The country is becoming increasingly secular. Regular attendance at religious services is decreasing. After more than 4 decades of Communist rule, the eastern part of the country had become far more secular than the western part. Representatives of religious groups note that only 5 to 10 percent of eastern inhabitants belong to a religious organization.

Following a rise in the incidence of anti-Semitic crimes and an increase in public criticism of the Israeli Government's actions in the Middle East, Jewish community leaders expressed disappointment in the leaders of other religious communities, as well as in some local and national politicians, for not speaking out more forcefully against anti-Semitism. In addition, several Jewish groups accused the print media of pro-Palestinian bias in their reporting of the situation in the Middle East and expressed concern that this alleged bias could increase anti-Semitic attitudes.

The Lutheran Church employs "sect commissioners" to investigate "sects, cults, and psycho-groups" and to publicize what they consider to be the dangers of these groups to the public. The Lutheran sect commissioners are especially active in their efforts to warn the public about supposed dangers posed by Scientology, as well as the Unification Church, Bhagwan-Osho, and Transcendental Meditation. The printed and Internet literature of the sect commissioners portrays these as "totalitarian," "pseudo-religious," and "fraudulent." The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, Christian Scientists, the New Apostolic Church, and the Johannish Church are characterized in less negative terms but nevertheless are singled out as "sects." The Catholic Church also employs sect commissioners, who generally restrict their activities to providing counsel to individuals who have questions about sects.

In the 1990s, three of the country's major political parties—the Christian Democratic Union and its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Free Democratic Party (FDP)—banned Scientologists from party membership. These bans, which have been challenged unsuccessfully in courts by excluded Scientologists, are still in effect.

With an estimated 4 million adherents, Islam is the third most commonly practiced religion in the country after Catholicism and Lutheranism. All branches of Islam are represented, with the vast majority of Muslims coming from other countries. At times this has led to societal discord, such as local resistance to the construction of mosques or disagreements over whether Muslims may use loudspeakers in residential neighborhoods to call the faithful to prayer. There also remain areas where the law conflicts with Islamic practices or raises religious freedom issues. In 2000 the Government published a comprehensive report on “Islam in Germany” that examined these issues in response to an inquiry from Parliament.

Reports continued of opposition to the construction of mosques in various communities around the country. The opposition generally centered on issues such as concern about increased traffic and noise that would result from new construction.

In October 2001, two young men of Arab origin were convicted of aggravated arson in association with an attack on a synagogue in Duesseldorf that month, which caused slight damage to the building. Police found Nazi symbols and related items in the suspects' homes. The synagogue remained under around-the-clock police protection at the end of the period covered by this report.

Authorities run a variety of tolerance-education programs, many focusing on anti-Semitism. The programs receive input and assistance from Jewish organizations. Participation in the June 2003 OSCE Special Conference on Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Region is expected to lead to new government initiatives in this area.

Recent anti-Semitic incidents indicate that Arab youths are increasingly behind attacks on and harassment of the country's Jews. In May, an American orthodox Jew in Berlin was attacked by a group of teenagers who appeared to be of Arab origin. The attack was the fourth in a series of similar incidents in which Arab youths would verbally harass, spit on, and physically assault a person who appeared Jewish. Authorities strongly condemned the attacks and devoted significant investigative resources to the cases.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

In response to anti-Semitic crimes, members of the U.S. Mission closely followed the Government's responses and officially expressed the U.S. Government's opposition to anti-Semitism. Mission officers maintained contacts with Jewish groups and continue to monitor closely the incidence of anti-Semitic activity.

The status of Scientology was the subject of many discussions during the period covered by this report. The U.S. Government expressed its concerns over infringement of individual rights because of religious affiliation and over the potential for discrimination in international trade posed by the screening of foreign firms for possible Scientology affiliation. Mission officers facilitated contacts between the country's Scientologists and government officials as they took the first steps toward a dialog and encouraged the Government to designate an ombudsman, or central point of contact, for Scientology matters with whom U.S. officials and Scientologists themselves can carry on a more intensive dialog on the status of Scientology. The U.S. Government consistently maintained that the determination of whether any organization is religious is for the organization itself to make.

GREECE

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodoxy) as the “prevailing” religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice; however, while the Government generally respects this right, non-Orthodox groups sometimes face administrative obstacles or encounter legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Non-Orthodox citizens have complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 50,942 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10.9 million. Approximately 97 percent of citizens identify themselves at least nominally with the Greek Orthodox faith. There are approximately 500,000 to 800,000 Old Calendarists throughout the country. With the exception of the Turcophone Muslim community (some of whose rights and privileges as well as related government obligations are covered by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne), the Government does not keep statistics on religious groups; censuses do not ask for religious affiliation. Ethnic Greeks account for a sizeable percentage of most non-Orthodox religions. The balance of citizens is composed of Muslims (officially estimated at 98,000, although some Muslims claim up to 140,000 countrywide); accurate figures for other religious groups are not available. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses are estimated at 50,000; Catholics at 50,000; Protestants, including evangelicals, at 30,000; and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) at 300. Scientologists claim 500 active registered members. The Jewish community numbers approximately 5,000 adherents; an estimated 1,000 reside in Thessaloniki and the majority are citizens. Approximately 250 members of the Baha'i Faith, the majority of whom are citizens of non-Greek ethnicity, are scattered throughout the country. There also are small populations of Anglicans, Baptists, and nondenominational Christians. There is no official or unofficial estimate of atheists.

The majority of non-citizen residents are not Greek Orthodox. The largest group is the Albanians (approximately 700,000 including legal and illegal residents); most nominally are Muslim, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic, but the majority are non-practicing. There is a growing Muslim immigrant population in the country.

Catholics reside primarily in Athens and on the islands of Syros, Tinos, Naxos, and Corfu, as well as in the cities of Thessaloniki and Patras. Immigrants from the Philippines and Poland also practice Catholicism. The Bishop of Athens heads the Roman Catholic Holy Synod.

Some religious groups, such as the evangelicals and Jehovah's Witnesses, consist almost entirely of ethnic Greeks. Other groups, such as Mormons and Anglicans, consist of an approximately equal number of ethnic Greeks and non-Greeks.

The Turcophone Muslim community, concentrated in Thrace with small communities in Rhodes, Kos, and in Athens, is composed mainly of ethnic Turks but also includes Pomaks and Roma. A growing number of Muslim immigrants from South Asia and elsewhere live in Athens and in rural areas.

Scientologists, most of whom are located in the Athens area, practice their faith through a registered nonprofit civil law organization.

Foreign missionary groups in the country, including Protestants and Mormons, are active; the latter states that it has approximately 80 missionaries in the country each year, for approximately 2-year terms.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes the Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ (Greek Orthodoxy) as the prevailing religion, but also provides for the right of all citizens to practice the religion of their choice; however, while the Government generally respects this right, non-Orthodox groups sometimes face administrative obstacles or encounter legal restrictions on religious practice. The Constitution prohibits proselytizing and stipulates that no rite of worship may disturb public order or offend moral principles. The Orthodox Church exercises significant political and economic influence. The Government, under the direction of the Ministry of Education and Religion, provides some financial support by, for example, paying for the salaries and religious training of clergy, and financing the maintenance of Orthodox Church buildings. However, the conscientious objector provision in the Constitution and an effective, well-run Ombudsman's office, which successfully handled an increasing number of cases, fostered government tolerance of minority religions.

The Orthodox Church, Judaism, and Islam are the only groups considered to be a "legal person of public law" by law. Other religions are considered "legal persons of private law." In practice the primary distinction is that the establishment of

“houses of prayer” of religions other than the Orthodox Church, Judaism, or Islam is regulated by the general provisions of the Civil Code regarding corporations. For example, these religions cannot own property as religious entities; the property must belong to a specifically created legal entity rather than to the church itself. In practice this places an additional legal and administrative burden on non-Orthodox religious community organizations, although in most cases this process has been handled routinely. Members of minority religious groups that are classified as private entities also cannot be represented in court as religious entities and cannot will or inherit property as a religious entity. The law extended legal recognition to Catholic churches and related entities established prior to 1946. By virtue of the Orthodox Church’s status as the “prevailing” religion, the Government recognizes the Orthodox Church’s canon law (the official statutes of the Church); however, the Catholic Church unsuccessfully has sought government recognition of its canon law since 1999. In 2003 the Roman Catholic church was invited by the Ministry of Education and Religion to a dialog on the legal personality of their Church. The Roman Catholic church wants the same status it has in other European Union (EU) countries and does not wish to be a “legal entity of public law.”

Two laws from the 1930s require recognized or “known” religious groups to obtain “house of prayer” permits from the Ministry of Education and Religion in order to open houses of worship. By law the Ministry may base its decision to issue permits on the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop. No formal mechanism exists to gain recognition as a known religion, but Ministry officials state that they no longer obtain the opinion of the local Orthodox bishop when considering house of prayer permit applications. According to the Ministry’s officials, applications for additional houses of prayer are numerous and are approved routinely; however, in 2000 the Ministry denied the Scientologists of Greece their application for recognition and a house of prayer permit on the grounds that Scientology is not a religion. In 2003 the Scientologists withdrew an appeal for a house of prayer permit at the Supreme Court.

Leaders of some non-Orthodox religious groups claimed that all taxes on religious organizations were discriminatory, even those that the Orthodox Church has to pay, because the Government subsidizes the Orthodox Church, while other groups are self-supporting. The Government also pays the salaries of the two official Muslim religious leaders (“muftis,” Islamic judges and religious leaders with limited civic responsibilities) in Thrace and provides them with official vehicles.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which still is in force, gives Muslims in Thrace the right to maintain social and charitable organizations (“wakfs”) and provides for muftis to render religious judicial services.

The Treaty of Lausanne provides that the Turcophone Muslim minority has the right to Turkish-language education, with a reciprocal entitlement for the Greek minority in Istanbul (approximately 3,000 persons). Western Thrace has both Koranic and secular Turkish-language schools. In 2000 approximately 19 Turkish-language textbooks approved jointly by the Governments of Greece and Turkey were distributed in the schools, the first such distribution since 1974. There were 6,774 Muslim children who attended Turkish-language public schools and an additional 267 attended 2 bilingual middle schools with a religious curriculum. There were 874 Muslim students who attended Turkish-language secondary schools, and approximately 3,159 Muslim students attended Greek-language secondary schools. Some Muslims, especially in Thrace, attend high school in Turkey. There is an EU-funded program to teach Greek as a second language to Muslim children.

Other than in one multicultural elementary education “pilot school,” the Government does not provide instruction in Greek as a second language to Turcophone children in the Athens area. Muslim parents report that their children are unable to succeed in school as a result of this policy. 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.

Government incentives encourage Muslim and Christian educators to reside and teach in isolated villages.

The law permits the Minister of Education to give special consideration to Muslims for admission to universities and technical institutes. The law requires universities and technical institutes to set aside places for Muslim students each year. Fewer than half of the 400 places available were filled by the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 2000 the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs rejected the application of the Scientologists for recognition and a house of prayer permit on the grounds that Scientology “is not a religion.” The Church of Scientology is registered as a

philosophical organization because legal counsel advised that the Government would not recognize Scientology as a religion. In 2003 Scientologists withdrew their appeal to the Supreme Court for recognition as a religion, though they continue to operate unobstructed as an "association of civil law."

Minority religious groups have requested that the Government abolish laws regulating house of prayer permits, which are required in order to open houses of worship. Many provisions of these laws are not applied in practice, but local police still have the authority to bring minority churches to court that operate or build places of worship without a permit.

A priest defrocked by the Greek Orthodox priest (but still in good standing with the Macedonian Orthodox Church) in northern Greece continued to hold religious services in Macedonian (the language of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) in a meeting hall, despite complaints by Orthodox clergy. 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. The non-Greek Orthodox churches must provide separate and lengthy applications to government authorities on such matters as gaining permission to move places of worship to larger facilities. In contrast Greek Orthodox officials have an institutionalized link between the church hierarchy and the Ministry of Education and Religion to handle administrative matters.

Although Jehovah's Witnesses are recognized as a "known" religion, members continued to face some harassment in the form of arbitrary identity checks, difficulties in burying their dead, and local officials' resistance to their construction of churches (which in most cases was resolved quickly and favorably). In 2003 the Jehovah's Witnesses appealed to a court in a property dispute over taxation rates involving their officially recognized headquarters.

In the past several religious denominations, including foreign Mormons and Jews, reported difficulty in renewing the visas of their non-EU citizen ministers and rabbis because the Government does not have a distinct religious workers' visa category. As part of obligations under the Schengen Treaty and the Treaty of Amsterdam, all non-EU citizens face a more restrictive visa and residence regime than they did in the past.

Despite criticism from the Orthodox Church, in 2001 the Government began issuing new identity cards that do not note religious affiliation.

Non-Orthodox citizens have claimed that they face career limits within the military, police, fire-fighting forces, and the civil service because of their religions. In the military, generally only members of the Orthodox faith become officers, leading some members of other faiths to declare themselves Orthodox. Few Muslim military personnel have advanced to the rank of reserve officer, and there were reports of pressure exerted on Greek Orthodox military personnel not to marry in the religious ceremony of their non-Orthodox partner, because they may be passed over for promotion. In addition, the rigorous training requirements to advance also require a solid educational background and fluency in Greek, posing an obstacle for many Turcophone Muslims.

The percentage of Muslim citizens employed in the public sector and in state-owned industries and corporations is disproportionately lower than the percentage of Muslims in the population of citizens, which many observers claim is due to the language barrier, not to religious discrimination. In Xanthi and Komotini, while Muslims hold seats on the prefectural and town councils, there are no Muslims among regular employees of the prefecture. Muslims in Thrace claim that they are hired only for lower level, part-time work. According to the Government, lack of fluency in written and spoken Greek and the need for university degrees for high-level positions limit the number of Muslims eligible for government jobs.

The growing Muslim community in Athens (composed primarily of economic migrants from Thrace, South Asia, and the Middle East) is still without its own mosque or any state-appointed cleric to officiate at various religious functions, including funerals. Members of the Muslim community often transport their deceased back to Thrace for religious burials. In 2000 the Parliament approved a bill allowing construction of the first Islamic cultural center and mosque in the Athens area; however, construction had not started by the end of the period covered by this report. Members of the Orthodox Church oppose the cultural center, claiming it may "spread the ideology of Islam and the Arab world" rather than act as a simple museum. According to official sources, 287 mosques operate freely in Thrace and on the islands of Rhodes and Kos.

Differences remain within the Turcophone Muslim community and between segments of the community and the Government regarding the means of selecting muftis. Under the law, the Government appointed two muftis and one assistant

mufti, all residents in Thrace. The appointments to 10-year terms were based on the recommendations of a committee of Turcophone Muslim notables selected by the Government. The Government argued that it must appoint the muftis, because in addition to religious duties, they perform judicial functions in many civil and domestic matters under Muslim religious law, for which the State pays them. In 2001 the mufti from Komotini and the mufti from Xanthi were reappointed for another 10-year term. Some Muslims accept the authority of the two government-appointed muftis; other Muslims, backed by Turkey, have "elected" two muftis to serve their communities, although there is no established procedure or practice for election.

Controversy between the Muslim community and the Government also continued over the management and self-government of the "wakfs" (Muslim charitable organizations), particularly regarding the appointment of officials and the degree and type of administrative control. A 1980 law placed the administration of the wakfs in the hands of the appointed muftis and their representatives. In response to objections from some Muslims that this arrangement weakened the financial autonomy of the wakfs and violated the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne, a 1996 presidential decree placed the wakfs under the administration of a committee for 3 years as an interim measure pending resolution of outstanding problems. The interim period was extended in 1999.

Evangelical parishes are located throughout the country. Members of missionary faiths report having difficulties with harassment and police detention due to antiproselytizing laws. Church officials express concern that antiproselytizing laws remain on the books, although such laws no longer hinder their ministering to the poor and to children.

In 1998 a law providing an alternative form of mandatory national service for conscientious objectors (for religious and ideological reasons) took effect. The law provides that conscientious objectors may work in state hospitals or municipal services for 36 months in lieu of mandatory military service. Conscientious objector groups generally characterized the legislation as a positive first step but criticized the 36-month alternative service term, which is double the regular 18-month period of military service. Also since 1998, all members of Jehovah's Witnesses who wished to submit applications for alternative nonmilitary service have been permitted to do so. There were religiously-based conscientious objector cases still pending resolution at the end of the reporting period. These cases pertain to individuals who were in the process of contesting a prison term for refusing to serve in the military and whose cases were not covered by the 1998 law.

The law prohibits the functioning of private schools in buildings owned by non-Orthodox religious foundations; however, this law is not enforced in practice.

Religious instruction in Orthodoxy in public, primary, and secondary schools is mandatory for all Orthodox students. Non-Orthodox students are exempt from this requirement. However, members of Jehovah's Witnesses have reported some instances of discrimination related to attendance at religious education classes or other celebrations of religious or nationalistic character. Members of the Muslim community in Athens are lobbying for Islamic religious instruction for their children. The neighborhood schools offer no alternative supervision for the children during the period of religious instruction. The community has complained that this forces parents to have their children attend Orthodox religious instruction by default.

In the past, Muslim activists have complained that the Government regularly lodges tax liens against the wakfs, although they are tax-free foundations in theory. Under a national land and property registry law that entered into full effect in 1999, the wakfs, along with all property holders, must register all of their property with the Government. The law permits the Government to seize any property that the owners are not able to document; there are built-in reporting and appeals procedures. The wakfs were established in 1560; however, due to the destruction of files during the two world wars, the wakfs are unable to document ownership of much of their property. They have not registered the property, so they cannot pay assessed taxes. The Government had not sought to enforce either the assessments or the registration requirement by the end of the period covered by this report.

In Thessaloniki in 1999, the Government Tax Office refused to recognize the Jehovah's Witnesses as a nonprofit association (Evangelicals and Baha'is are considered nonprofit associations) and imposed an inheritance tax for property willed to them. The groups appealed the decision in 2000; the Court of Appeals overturned the imposed tax in April 2001. However, in 2001 the tax office in Thessaloniki again refused to recognize Jehovah's Witnesses as a nonprofit association in two more cases and again imposed an inheritance tax for property willed to them.

Buddhist citizens have claimed that the lack of cremation as an available means of burial infringes on their religious rights. Citizens who wish to be cremated must be shipped at significant cost to Bulgaria or other countries.

By the end of the reporting period, the Esphigmenou Monastery at Mt. Athos was awaiting a decision by the council of state regarding their appeal of an eviction order against the monks in November 2002. This situation appears to be an internal matter involving a difference of view between the monastery and the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Church leaders report that their permanent members (non-missionaries) do not encounter discriminatory treatment. However, police regularly detained Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses (on average once every 2 weeks) usually after receiving complaints that the individuals were engaged in proselytizing. In most cases, these individuals were held for several hours at a police station and then released with no charges filed. Many reported that they were not allowed to call their lawyers and that they were abused verbally by police officers for their religious beliefs. In 2002 there were three new charges of proselytism against members of Jehovah's Witnesses; however, the Public Prosecutor had not filed charges by the end of the period covered by this report. Another three cases remained pending in the courts.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees apart from the problems of temporary police detention experienced by Mormons and members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Citizens tend to link religious affiliation very closely to ethnicity. Many attribute the preservation of national identity to the actions of the Greek Orthodox Church during approximately 400 years of Ottoman rule and the subsequent nation-building period. The Church exercises significant social, political, and economic influence and it owns a considerable, although undetermined, amount of property.

Many citizens consider an ethnic Greek also an Orthodox Christian. Non-Orthodox citizens have complained of being treated with suspicion or told that they were not truly Greek when they revealed their religious affiliation.

Members of minority faiths have reported incidents of societal discrimination, such as local bishops warning parishioners not to visit clergy or members of minority faiths and neighbors, and requesting that the police arrest missionaries for proselytizing. However, with the exception of the Muslim minority of Thrace, most members of minority faiths consider themselves satisfactorily integrated into society. Organized official interaction between religious communities is infrequent.

Some non-Orthodox religious communities believe that they have been unable to communicate with officials of the Orthodox Church and claim that the attitude of the Orthodox Church toward their faiths has increased social intolerance toward their religions. The Orthodox Church has issued a list of practices and religious groups, including members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelical Protestants, Scientologists, Mormons, Baha'is, and others, which it believes to be sacrilegious. Officials of the Orthodox Church have acknowledged that they refuse to enter into dialog with religious groups considered harmful to Orthodox worshippers; church leaders instruct Orthodox Greeks to shun members of these faiths.

There were a number of Holocaust commemorative events throughout the country in 2003.

Anti-Semitism continues to exist, particularly in the press. Vandalism of Jewish monuments continued to be a problem during the reporting period, although it was vigorously condemned by the Government. Some schoolbooks still carry negative references to Roman Catholics, Jews, and others.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy officers meet regularly with working-level officials responsible for religious affairs in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Education and Religious Affairs. The Ambassador and Political Counselor discussed religious freedom with senior government

officials and religious leaders. The U.S. Embassy also regularly discusses religious freedom issues in contacts with other government officials, including mayors, regional leaders, and Members of Parliament. Officers from the Embassy and the Consulate General in Thessaloniki meet regularly with representatives of various religious groups, including the Greek Orthodox Church, and the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic communities. The U.S. Embassy investigates every complaint of religious discrimination brought to its attention.

In 2002 employees of the U.S. Embassy's consular section assisted Bible Baptist clergy to receive permission to visit all prisoners, not only those of the Baptist faith. The consular section also has followed actively issues relating to religious workers' visas and property taxes.

The U.S. Embassy and Consulate promote and support initiatives related to religious freedom. For example, Embassy staff has gathered leaders of the religious minority groups in Athens together for representational dinners.

The Ambassador and embassy officials regularly visit religious sites throughout the country and meet with representatives of all faiths, soliciting their participation in Embassy social events.

HUNGARY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the four "historic religions" and certain other denominations enjoy some privileges not available to other faiths.

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 35,910 square miles, and its population is an estimated 10.2 million.

Strict enforcement of data protection regulations impedes the collection of official statistics on popular participation in religious life. However, independent surveys in 1996 and 1997 indicated that the population is not particularly devout. Only 15 percent of those surveyed considered themselves to be religiously active and closely followed the tenets of their religion. The majority, 55 percent, said that they practiced religion in their own way or were nominally religious but not regularly active in their religious community. Approximately 30 percent said that they were nonreligious.

The 2001 national census contained an optional question on religious affiliation, and 90 percent of the population provided a response. According to the census results, 55 percent of the country's citizens are Roman Catholic, 15 percent are members of the Reformed Church, 3 percent are members of the Lutheran Church, and less than 1 percent are followers of Judaism. These four groups are considered the country's historic religions. Three percent of respondents identified themselves as Greek Catholics, and 15 percent of respondents declared no religious affiliation. The remaining percentage of the population is divided between a number of other denominations. The largest among these is the Congregation of Faith, a Hungarian evangelical Christian movement. Other denominations include a broad range of Christian groups, including five Orthodox denominations. In addition, there are seven Buddhist denominations and two Islamic communities.

A 1996 law permits citizens to donate one percent of their income tax to the religion of their choice and an additional one percent to the nonprofit agency of their choice. Statistics from the collection of tax revenue voluntarily directed for use by religious groups confirm the ranking of traditional estimates of religious affiliation.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this

right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The 1990 Law on the Freedom of Conscience regulates the activities and benefits enjoyed by religious communities and establishes the criteria by which they attain that legal designation. To become registered as a religion, religious groups must submit a statement to a local court declaring that they have at least 100 followers. While any group is free to practice their faith, formal registration makes available to a religious group certain protections and privileges and grants access to several forms of state funding. The courts have registered more than 136 religions.

Religious instruction is not part of the education curricula in public schools; however, the State permits primary and secondary school students to enroll in extra-curricular religious education classes. Optional religious instruction is held after the normal school day and is taught by representatives of religious groups in school facilities. While the Government makes provisions for minority religions to engage in religious education in public schools, the four historical religions provide the majority of after-hours religious instruction. During the 2002 school year, 34 registered religions provided religious instruction to 517,370 students in public schools.

A 1994 government decree on the military chaplain's service created permanent pastoral representation for the four historic religions in the country's defense forces. The decree also requires the military to facilitate the rights of other religions to practice their religion and to provide pastoral care for members of the military. The Ministry of Defense funds and maintains the chaplain's service. Under the decree, soldiers do not receive preferential treatment for either foregoing or using the chaplain's service. This provision is respected in practice. A similar system exists for the provision of religious services to prisoners.

In the second half of 2002, Parliament repealed a law that would have modified the way in which the State allocates public funds to registered religions. The repealed law, which was passed by the Orban government before the April 2002 general elections but did not come into force, would have permitted the Government to calculate support for religious groups based on the 2001 census data rather than by measuring the number of voluntary 1 percent tax contributions to individual religions. Use of the census data would have benefited the historical religions and shifted funds away from smaller, newly established religions. The repeal of the law reinstated the 1 percent method of determining support for religious groups.

In 2002 the State allocated approximately \$89.6 million (20.6 billion HUF) in public funds for various religious activities and all related programs. Government expenditures supported religious practice, educational work, and the maintenance of public art collections of cultural value. Compensation for non-restituted religious property, the reconstruction of religious institutions, and the general subsidy for religious activities comprised the largest components of state financial support. The Government provides the same level of financial support for private religious education as for state institutions on a per child basis. Government support generally remains constant year-to-year.

At the end of 2001, the Government also reached an agreement with the four historical religions to support clergy in settlements with a population of less than 5,000. Clergy in the small settlements receive supplementary wages for their services. The money, which in 2002 totaled \$5.8 million (1.35 billion HUF), has been distributed through the religious groups since January 1, 2002. As there are no functioning synagogues in small settlements, the Government modified its agreement with the Jewish community to allow it to spend the money on reconstruction and maintenance of Jewish cemeteries. After a lengthy series of talks, the Government concluded a similar agreement in the beginning of 2002 with six minor churches: the Baptist, Unitarian, and Pentecostal Churches, and the Budai Serb, Romanian, and Greek Orthodox Churches.

To promote the revitalization of religious institutions and settle property issues, the Government signed separate agreements with the country's four historic religions and with two smaller churches (Hungarian Baptist and Budai Serb Orthodox) between 1997 and 1999. The religious groups and the State agreed on a number of properties to be returned and an amount of monetary compensation to be paid for properties that could not be returned. These agreements are subsumed under the 1991 Compensation Law, which require the Government to compensate religious groups for properties confiscated by the Government after January 1, 1946. In 2002 the Government paid religious groups \$24.3 million (5.64 billion HUF) as compensation for the assets confiscated during the Communist regime. By 2011 the State is expected to pay an estimated total of \$179 million (42 billion HUF) to religious groups for buildings not returned. While these agreements primarily address property issues and restitution, they also have provisions addressing the public service

activities of the religious groups, religious education, and the preservation of monuments.

As of the end of 2002, there were more than 1,550 pending cases of real property that once belonged to religious groups, which the State must decide whether or not to return before 2011. Real estate cases have involved 12 religious groups: Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian, Baptist, Hungarian Romanian Orthodox, Hungarian Orthodox, Budai Serb Orthodox, Hungarian Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, the Salvation Army, and the Confederation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz). In the spring, the Government announced a decision to return about 150 properties primarily belonging to the Catholic, Calvinist, and Lutheran Churches. Overall 7,220 claims were made by religious groups for property restitution under the 1991 Compensation Law: 1,600 cases were rejected as inapplicable under the law; the Government decided to return property in 1,129 cases and gave cash payments in another 1,770 cases; approximately 1,000 cases were resolved directly between former and present owners without government intervention; and the remainder (approximately 1,660 cases) must be decided by 2011. Religious orders and schools have regained some property confiscated by the Communist regime.

In January the Medgyessy government reached an agreement with the Mazsihisz on compensation payments to Holocaust survivors and their heirs. The agreement settled a 6-year dispute between the Government and the Jewish community. Under the terms of the plan, which came into force the same year, qualified recipients received \$1,724 (400,000 HUF) from the State. Only applicants who complied with a 1994 registration deadline are eligible to participate in the program, a number estimated by Mazsihisz to be 150,000 persons. Mazsihisz stated that many potential beneficiaries did not originally register, either out of concern for identifying themselves on a government register as Jews or from skepticism of the 1992 compensation law.

Easter Monday, Whit Monday, All Saints Day, and Christmas Day are all celebrated as national holidays. These holidays do not impact negatively any religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

However, the Government has demonstrated a willingness to treat the larger or longer-established religions more favorably than the minority religious communities. Several laws and government decrees specifically grant rights and privileges to historical religions that are not directly granted to other religious groups, such as in the decree on the military chaplain's service and, until January, the tax code.

Before January the tax code only permitted tax-deductible donations to the country's large or long-established religions. For donors to have qualified for the deduction under the previous tax structure, a religion had to document one of the following: that it had been present in the country for 100 years or more, that it had been registered legally for at least 30 years (as no new religions were registered under the Communist regime, this essentially meant religions registered before 1925), or that the present religion's following equaled 1 percent of all tax contributors (approximately 43,000 persons). These criteria limited the tax benefit to only 14 of the some 136 registered religions in the country. As of January, an amendment to the law governing state financing of religions made donations to any registered religion tax-deductible.

There were credible reports that the Government delayed and, in some cases, denied accreditation to religious schools run by smaller, newly established religions in a manner inconsistent with the law. An application by the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness to operate a theology institute has been pending before the State's accreditation board since 2000. Despite a recommendation in favor of the accreditation from the Ministry of Education, a lengthy examination of the school's proposed curriculum has delayed a final decision from the board. The Government has not subjected accreditation requests from the historical religions to similar scrutiny.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between religious groups are amicable, and there is little friction between religions. Several Christian churches and the Jewish community have institutionalized a Christian-Jewish dialogue, bringing together religious academics for regular discussions. Across a wide range of other areas, religions also have shown a great willingness to work together to achieve common social or political goals.

Overall society welcomed the increasing religious activity that followed the transition from communism. However, there also is some concern over the ease with which regulations on religion may be exploited, as well as concerns about the perceived undue influence that some "new religions" have over their followers.

The 1997 changes to the Penal Code made it easier to enforce and stiffen penalties for hate crimes committed on the basis of the victim's ethnicity, race, or nationality. Although the law does not explicitly mention religious affiliation, the Government has used the law's prohibition against public incitement to curb hate speech targeted against religious groups. In early 2003, the Office of the Prosecutor successfully prosecuted a member of the extremist Justice and Life Party for publishing an anti-Semitic article in a local newspaper. In fall 2002, two individuals faced charges for printing and distributing anti-Semitic tracts from the World War II era.

There continued to be occasional reports of vandalism or destruction of Christian and Jewish property. During 2002 the National Police reported 200 cases of vandalism to cemeteries, compared with 68 cases in 2001. During just the first quarter of 2002, the National Police reported 50 cases of burglary involving places of worship and 140 cases of burglary involving cemeteries, compared with 50 cases involving places of worship and 4 cases involving cemeteries in 2001. Most police and religious authorities consider these incidents as acts of youth vandalism and not indications of religious intolerance.

Anti-Semitism remained a problem, which the Government continued to address. While there were no reports of anti-Semitic violence, there were incidents of desecration of Jewish tombstones and anti-Semitic graffiti on property. In the campaign period before the autumn 2002 municipal elections vandals spray-painted the swastika and Star of David on some campaign posters of the Socialist party. In August 2002, a Catholic bishop speaking at a St. Stephen's Day celebration made derogatory statements using an oblique reference understood to mean Jews. The Government initiated criminal proceedings against a former Member of Parliament for remarks that were considered anti-Semitic. These proceedings continued without a verdict at the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy actively monitors religious activities, maintaining regular contact with government officials, Members of Parliament, leaders of large and small religions, and representatives of local and international nongovernmental organizations that address issues of religious freedom. Through these contacts, embassy officers have tracked closely recent government efforts to modify the country's laws and the impact this might have on smaller, less well-established religions.

The Embassy also has remained active on issues of compensation and property restitution for Holocaust victims. Embassy officers have worked with Mazsihisz, the Hungarian Jewish Public Foundation, other local and international Jewish organizations, and with Members of Parliament and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage to maintain a dialog on restitution issues, promote fair compensation, and secure access to Holocaust-era archives.

The U.S. Embassy continues to urge the Government to speak out against anti-Semitism and hate speech.

ICELAND

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the State financially supports and promotes Lutheranism as the country's official religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. The Lutheran Church, which is the state religion, enjoys some advantages not available to other faiths in the country.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 39,600 square miles, and its population is approximately 288,000. Most residents live on or near the coasts. The area surrounding the capital, Reykjavik, alone has approximately 62 percent of the country's total population.

According to the National Statistical Bureau, 249,456 persons (87 percent of the total population) are members of the state Lutheran Church. During the period covered by this report, a total of 882 individuals resigned from the Church, far exceeding the 196 new registrants. Many of those who resigned from the state Church joined one of the Lutheran Free Churches, which have a total membership of 12,062 persons (4.1 percent). The breakdown in membership is as follows: Reykjavik Free Church—5,694 members; Hafnarfjordur Free Church—3,922 members; and Reykjavik Independent Church—2,446 members. A total of 12,239 individuals (4 percent) are members of 21 other recognized and registered religious organizations: Roman Catholic Church—5,200 members; Pentecostal Church—1,681 members; The Way, Free Church—714 members; Seventh-day Adventists—726 members; Jehovah's Witnesses—649 members; Asa Faith Society—628 members; The Cross—513 members; Buddhist Association of Iceland—461 members; Baha'i Faith—380 members; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)—191 members; The Icelandic Christ-Church—197 members; Muslim Association—229 members; Betania—139 members; Parish Of St. Nicholas Of The Russian Orthodox Church—92 members; The Church of Evangelism—78 members; Kefas, Christian Community—110 members; Sjonarhaed Congregation—53 members; Zen in Iceland, Night Pasture—36 members; The Believers' Fellowship—38 members; First Baptist Church—11 members; and the Birth of the Holy Mary, a Serbian Orthodox Church—113 members. There were 7,740 individuals (2.7 percent) who belonged to other or non-specified religious organizations and 6,704 (2.3 percent) who were not part of any religious organization. There also are religions, such as Judaism, which have been practiced in the country for years, but have never requested official recognition. In official statistics these religions are listed as "other and non-specified."

Although the majority of citizens use traditional Lutheran rituals to mark events such as baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals, most Lutherans do not actively practice their faith. A growing number of citizens are choosing to mark important anniversaries and events with nonreligious ceremonies. For example, in the spring, 90 teenagers chose to be "confirmed" in a ceremony carried out by the 160-member Icelandic Ethical Humanist Association, a secular "life stance" organization founded in 1990 and a member of the International Humanist and Ethical Union.

According to statistics provided by the immigration authorities, the number of foreigners receiving a residence permit has increased significantly during the past several years. In direct relation to the increase in foreigners (itinerant workers, immigrants, and refugees), the number of religious organizations has increased. Foreigners make up over half of the Catholic population in Iceland. The Reykjavik Catholic Church holds one service each week in English, and many Filipinos attend. A growing number of Catholic Poles live in Iceland, where they work in the fishing and boat building industries. Since there are few Catholic churches outside of Reykjavik, Lutheran ministers regularly lend their churches to Catholic priests so that they may conduct masses for members in rural areas.

Mormons are the only significant foreign missionary group in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The official state religion is Lutheranism.

The Constitution provides all people 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 Lutheran Church as the state church and pledges the State's support and protection of the Church. Parliament has the power to pass a law to change this Article. Although surveys show that the majority of citizens favor the concept of separation of church and state, most probably would not support the change if it meant closing down Lutheran churches because of lack of funding. Although few citizens regularly attend services, they see the Lutheran religion as part of their culture and view the closing of a church as losing a part of their heritage. A bill to separate church and state will go before the next session of parliament but is not expected to succeed.

The State directly pays the salaries of the 146 ministers in the state church, and these ministers are considered public servants under the Ministry of Judicial and Ecclesiastical Affairs. The State operates a network of Lutheran parish churches throughout the country. In new housing areas, land automatically is set aside for the construction of a parish church to serve the neighborhood.

A 1999 law sets specific conditions and procedures that religious organizations must follow to gain state subsidies. All taxpayers 16 years of age and older must pay a church tax amounting to approximately \$104 (ISK 7,800) a year and a cemetery tax of approximately \$40 (ISK 2,952) a year. Individuals are free to direct their church tax payments to any of the religious groups officially registered and recognized by the State. For individuals who are not registered as belonging to a religious organization, or who belong to one that is not registered officially and recognized by the State, the tax payment goes to the University of Iceland, a secular institution. Atheists have objected to having their fee go to the University, asserting that this is inconsistent with the constitutional right of freedom of association.

During the year the Government gave the state church approximately \$46 million (ISK 3.5 billion). Of that, the church tax funded \$18 million (ISK 1.4 billion), the cemetery tax \$8.4 million (ISK 645 million), and general revenues \$20 million (ISK 1.5 billion). The state church runs all cemeteries in Iceland, and the \$8.4 million from the cemetery tax must be used solely for this purpose. The church tax also provided a total of \$1.6 million (ISK 126 million) to the other recognized religions and a total of \$1.05 million (ISK 83.6 million) to the University of Iceland.

Religious organizations that are seeking to be, or are already, officially recognized and registered must meet these conditions. No restrictions or requirements are placed on unregistered religious organizations, which have the same rights as other groups in society. The Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs handles applications for recognition and registration of religious organizations. The 1999 law provides for a three-member panel consisting of a theologian, a lawyer, and a social scientist to determine the bona fides of the applications. To become registered, a religious organization must, among other things, be well established within the country and have a core group of members who regularly practice the religion in compliance with its teachings. All registered religious organizations are required to submit an annual report to the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs describing the organization's operations over the past year. The new law also specifies that the leader of a religious organization must be at least 25 years old and pay taxes in the country.

A Sunni Muslim group attempted to register in 2001, but the Ministry of Justice rejected its application because it was incomplete. The group has reapplied, and the board is currently reviewing its application.

Law Number 108 confirms that parents control the religious affiliation of their children until the children reach the age of 16. However, the Children's Act requires that parents consult their children about any changes in the children's affiliation after the age of 12. In the absence of specific instructions to the contrary, children at birth are assumed to have the same religious affiliation as their mother and are registered as such.

Under Law Number 66, which regulates public elementary schools ("grunnskolar"), the Government requires instruction in religion and ethics based on Christianity during the entire period of compulsory education; that is, ages 6 through 15. Virtually all schools are public schools, with a few exceptions such as the one Roman Catholic parochial school, which is located in Reykjavik. All schools are subject to Law Number 66 with respect to the compulsory curriculum. However, the precise content of this instruction can vary. The curriculum is not rigid, and teachers often are given wide latitude in the classroom. Some teachers place greater emphasis on ethical and philosophical issues rather than on specifically religious instruction. Lessons on non-Christian religions are part of the curriculum, but teachers ultimately teach mostly about Christianity.

Students may be exempted from Christianity classes. The law provides the Minister of Education with the formal authority to exempt pupils from instruction in compulsory subjects such as Christianity. In practice, individual school authorities

issue exemptions informally. There is no obligation for school authorities to offer other religious or secular instruction in place of Christianity classes.

According to a report published this year by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), in some cases children find it difficult to obtain exemption from religious instruction, especially at the primary level. In addition, members of several non-Christian organizations expressed their concern to ECRI that students ridicule classmates who opt out of religious education. The ECRI report urges school officials to provide children who do not wish to attend religious instruction in Christianity with alternative classes. The report also asks officials to give all children the opportunity to learn about different religions and faiths.

The Government is passive rather than proactive in promoting interfaith understanding. The Government does not sponsor programs or official church-government councils to coordinate interfaith dialog, but many church groups sponsor meetings between the leaders of the various religious organizations. One of the ministers of the state Church, who is of Japanese origin, has been designated to serve the immigrant community and help recent arrivals of all faiths integrate into society.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Falun Gong requested a government apology stemming from incidents during the June 2002 visit by Chinese President Jiang Zemin to the country. They also filed a complaint with the Parliamentary Ombudsman, who can make recommendations to the Government. The complaint was being investigated at the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. If members of religious minorities face discrimination, it is more indirect in nature, taking the form of prejudice and lack of interfaith or intercultural understanding. The country has a small, close-knit, homogenous society that closely guards its culture and is not accustomed to accommodating outsiders. Even though most citizens are not active members of the state church, it is still an important part of the country's cultural identity.

During the last decade, there has been increased awareness of other religious groups. Informal interfaith meetings have occurred, and two NGOs assist new immigrants.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. The Embassy also maintains a regular dialog on religious freedom issues with the leaders of various religious groups and NGOs.

IRELAND

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 27,136 square miles, and its population was approximately 3.9 million in 2002.

The country is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. According to official government statistics collected during the 2002 census, the religious affiliation of the population is 88.4 percent Roman Catholic, 2.9 percent Church of Ireland (Anglican), 0.52 percent Presbyterian, 0.25 percent Methodist, 0.49 percent Muslim, and less than 0.1 percent Jewish. Approximately 4 percent of the population are members of other religions or have no specific religious belief.

There are a rising number of immigrants and asylum-seekers in Ireland, and they tend to be of a non-Catholic faith. Muslim and Orthodox Christian communities in particular continue to grow, especially in Dublin. Immigrants and noncitizens encounter few difficulties in practicing their faiths. There are some difficulties for non-Catholics associated with the availability of facilities and personnel outside of Dublin, such as the inability to find a mosque in rural areas due to the small numbers of non-Catholics in those communities.

Of the 3.46 million Roman Catholics in Ireland, 63 percent attend church once a week, according to the Catholic Bishops Conference.

SECTION II. STATUS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution prohibits promotion of one religion over another and discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, and the Government does not restrict the teaching or practice of any faith. There is no state religion, and there is no discrimination against nontraditional religious groups. There is no legal requirement that religious groups or organizations register with the Government, nor is there any formal mechanism for government recognition of a religion or religious group.

While Roman Catholicism is the clearly dominant religion, it is not favored officially or in practice. Due to the country's history and tradition as a predominantly Catholic country and society, the majority of those in political office are Catholic, and the major Catholic holidays are also national days.

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 are controlled partially by the Catholic Church. Under the terms of the Constitution, the Department of Education must and does provide equal funding to schools of different religious denominations (such as an Islamic school in Dublin). Although religious instruction is an integral part of the curriculum, parents may exempt their children from such instruction.

The Employment Equality Act prohibits discrimination in relation to employment on the basis of nine discriminatory grounds, including religion. An Equality Authority works toward continued progress toward the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality in employment. The Equal Status 2000 Act prohibits discrimination outside of the employment context (such as in education or provision of goods) based on the same grounds used in the Employment Equality Act.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: St. Patrick's Day (the country's national day), Good Friday, Easter Monday, Christmas Day, and St. Stephen's Day. These holidays do not negatively impact any religious groups.

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 ATTITUDES

Relations between various religious communities are amicable and friction is rare. Various religions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academic institutions

have established activities or projects designed to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions.

Society largely is homogenous; as a result, religious differences are not tied to ethnic or political differences. However, some citizens have political attitudes toward the conflict in Northern Ireland that are driven by their religious identities and loyalties. For example, some Catholics support Nationalist and Republican parties or ideals in the north on the basis of their religious loyalty.

In 2002 Mary Johnson, a former member of the Church of Scientology, sued the Church for compensation for psychiatric injuries she claimed to have suffered as a result of her membership, which included alleged threats and intimidation by the Church when she left the organization. The case was settled for an undisclosed amount during a court hearing.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains regular contact with all communities, including religious groups and NGOs that address issues of religious freedom on a regular basis.

ITALY

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

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. There is no state religion; however, the Catholic Church enjoys some privileges, stemming from its sovereign status and its historical political authority, not available to other faiths.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic Church's influential role in society has led to controversy when church teachings have appeared to influence Catholic legislators on matters of public policy. Increasing immigration has led to some anti-immigrant sentiment; for the country's many Muslim immigrants, religion has served as an additional factor differentiating them from native-born citizens.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 116,347 square miles, and its population is approximately 57 million. An estimated 87 percent of native-born citizens are nominally Roman Catholics. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses form the second largest denomination among such citizens, numbering approximately 400,000 adherents. However, immigration—both legal and illegal—continues to add large groups of non-Christian residents, mainly Muslims from North Africa, South Asia, Albania, and the Middle East, who number an estimated 1 million. Buddhists include approximately 40,000 adherents of European origin and 20,000 of Asian origin.

Scientologists claim approximately 100,000 members, Waldensians approximately 30,000 members, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) approximately 20,000 members. A Jewish community of approximately 30,000 persons maintains synagogues in 21 cities. Other significant religious communities include Orthodox churches, small Protestant groups, Japanese Buddhists, the Baha'i Faith, and South Asian Hindus.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Prior to the Constitution's adoption in 1947, the country's relations with the Catholic Church were governed by a 1929 Concordat, which resolved longstanding disputes stemming from the dissolution of the Papal States and established Catholicism as the country's state religion. A 1984 revision of the Concordat formalized the

principle of a secular state but maintained the practice of state support for religion—support that also could be extended, if requested, to non-Catholic confessions. In such cases, state support is to be governed by legislation implementing the provisions of an accord (“*intesa*”) between the Government and the religious confession. An *intesa* grants ministers of religions 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, through a voluntary check-off on taxpayer returns, of funds to that community, a privilege that some communities initially declined but later requested. The absence of an *intesa* does not affect a religious group’s ability to worship freely; however, the privileges granted by an *intesa* are not always granted automatically, and a religious community without an *intesa* does not benefit financially from the voluntary check-off on taxpayer returns.

In 1984 the first such accord granted specific benefits to the Waldensian Church. Similar accords, which are negotiated by the Interior Ministry and require parliamentary approval, extended similar benefits to the Adventists and Assembly of God (1988), Jews (1989), and Baptists and Lutherans (1995). In 2000 the Government signed accords with the Buddhist Union and Jehovah’s Witnesses; however, these *intese* did not receive parliamentary ratification before that Government left office. With new filings initiated by the Mormons (1998), the Apostolic Church (2000), the Orthodox Church of the Constantinople Patriarchate (1998), Hindus (2001), and (Japanese Buddhist) Soka Gakkai (2001), the current Government chose to complete work on pending requests and submit all such accords—including those previously signed with the Buddhist Union and Jehovah’s Witnesses—to Parliament as a single package. The Government plans to finalize pending omnibus religious freedom legislation, which incorporates current provisions contained in other laws, before seeking approval of the pending accords; the accords awaited parliamentary approval at the end of the period covered by this report. Divisions among the country’s Muslim organizations, as well as its multiple Muslim immigrant groups, have hindered that community’s efforts to seek an *intesa*.

The revised Concordat of 1984 accorded the Catholic Church certain privileges. For example, the Church is allowed to select Catholic teachers, paid by the State, to provide instruction in “hour of religion” courses taught in the public schools. This class is optional, and students who do not wish to attend are free to study other subjects or, in certain cases, to leave school early. While in the past this instruction involved Catholic priests teaching Catechism, church-selected instructors now may be either lay or religious, and their instruction is intended to include material relevant to non-Catholic faiths. Problems may arise in small communities where information about other faiths and numbers of non-Catholic communicants are limited. The Constitution prohibits state support for private schools; however, declining enrollment in Catholic schools has led Catholic Church officials, as operators of the country’s most extensive network of private schools, to seek government aid.

While Roman Catholicism is no longer the state religion, its role as the dominant religion occasionally gives rise to problems. In November 2002, the Pope addressed a joint session of Parliament for the first time, urging lawmakers to emphasize moral values and the society’s historical Christian heritage in exercising their duties. In January 2002, the Pope called on Catholic jurists to boycott divorce cases; however, Justice Minister Roberto Castelli noted that judges should not exercise “conscientious objection” in discharging their duties, and there have been no reports of judges boycotting divorce cases in response to the Pope’s statement. Subsequent to a series of church consultations with political leaders prior to the 2001 national elections, President Ciampi underlined the secular nature of the State and the Constitution’s explicit separation of religion and State. In June 2002, Parliament passed legislation favored by the Vatican that prohibited the use of donated sperm for artificial insemination. The legislation drew support from Catholic legislators across the political spectrum, while secular conservatives and Communists joined to oppose it. During the reporting period, prominent Catholic politicians joined the Pope and other church officials in asserting that the draft European Constitution should include language recognizing Europe’s Christian heritage.

The continuing presence of Catholic symbols, such as crucifixes, in courtrooms, schools, and other public buildings has drawn criticism and has led to a number of lawsuits. In March Parliament tabled proposed legislation from several parties requiring display of crucifixes in all public classrooms. In 2000 the Court of Cassation, the country’s highest appellate court, ruled in favor of a schoolteacher who asserted that crucifixes should not be present at voting sites maintained by a secular state. However, attempts by individual teachers to remove crucifixes from the classroom

in public schools, in deference to Muslim students, have resulted in newspaper editorial criticism for “excessive zeal.”

Missionaries or religious workers do not encounter problems but must apply for appropriate visas prior to arriving in the country.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Religious and government officials continued to encourage mutual respect for religious differences.

In view of the negative aspects of the country’s Fascist past, government leaders routinely acknowledge and pay tribute to Jews victimized by the country’s 1938 racial laws.

National, regional, and local authorities organize annual educational initiatives and other events to support National Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27. In April 2003, Parliament approved the creation of a National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Ferrara.

Increasing immigration, much of it from China, South Asia, North and West Africa, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Turkey, and the Middle East, is altering demographic and cultural patterns in communities across the country and has led to some anti-immigrant sentiment. For the country’s many Muslim immigrants, religion serves as an additional factor differentiating them from native-born citizens. Some Catholic politicians and community leaders have contributed to popular reaction by emphasizing the perceived threat posed by immigrants to the country’s “national identity” and what they view as the country’s need to favor immigration by Catholics “or at least Christians.” On occasion church spokesmen have emphasized the difficulties in Catholic-Muslim mixed marriages.

The arrest and prosecution of Islamic extremists for using prayer centers to plan, coordinate, and support terrorism and the replacement of the imam of Rome’s Grand Mosque for preaching violence against “infidels” prompted some commentators and politicians to generalize about Islam’s incompatibility with societies organized around Judeo-Christian values and beliefs. Other prominent politicians, including Interior Minister Guiseppe Pisanu and Senate President Marcello Pera, rejected such generalizations and urged increased interfaith dialog. Pera advocated rapid conclusion of an intesa with the Islamic faith as an additional means to isolate extremists.

The Northern League political party, a minority member of the governing coalition, asserted that practices present in many Islamic societies, notably polygamy, Islamic family law, the role of women, and the lack of separation between religion and state, rendered many Muslim immigrants incompatible for integration into society.

Government units in the country provide funds for the construction of places of worship as well as public land for their construction, and they help preserve and maintain historic places of worship that shelter much of the country’s artistic and cultural heritage. The Campania regional administration has devoted public funds toward the construction of a mosque in Naples despite the absence of a formal intesa between the State and the Muslim confession.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

KAZAKHSTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the various religious communities worship largely without government interference; however, local officials attempt on occasion to limit the practice of religion by some nontraditional groups.

Such attempts are often corrected upon the intervention of higher-level officials or courts.

The overall status of religious freedom improved during the period covered by this report. President Nursultan Nazarbayev began an initiative to promote dialog among religions; an international conference drawing regional dignitaries and religious figures was held in February. However, the President and other senior officials also spoke out on the need to contain religious extremism, and officials at all levels continued to regard religious extremism with concern. Following the Constitutional Council's April 2002 determination that restrictive amendments to the National Religion Law were unconstitutional, no further attempts have been made to amend the legislation. Instances of harassment of religious organizations by local officials, including legal actions against the Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists, decreased during the period covered by this report. There were credible reports from throughout the country that local law enforcement officials regularly visited religious organizations for inspections. There were several instances during the reporting period when the intervention of higher-level officials corrected unwarranted harassment of religious groups by local officials.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. In 2001 Presidents Nazarbayev and Bush issued a joint statement reaffirming "our mutual commitments to advance the rule of law and promote religious freedom and other universal human rights." The Ambassador and other U.S. officials continually remind Government officials of their commitment and international standards for religious freedom, and have supported the country's efforts to increase links and understanding among religious groups. The Embassy sponsored the 2-week visit to the U.S. of the country's senior Muslim leader as well as exchange programs with other Muslim leaders.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 1,052,540 square miles, and according to an unpublished June 2003 estimate of the Government's Agency for Statistics, its population is approximately 14,892,500.

The society is ethnically diverse, and many religions are represented. Ethnic Kazakhs, who constitute approximately one half of the national population, historically are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School. Ethnic Uzbeks, Uyghurs, and Tatars, comprising less than 10 percent of the population, also largely are Sunni Hanafi. Other Islamic groups, which account for less than 1 percent of the population, include Shafit Sunni (traditionally practiced by Chechens), Shiite, Sufi, and Akhmadi. Slavs, mostly Russians but also Ukrainians and Belorussians, are by tradition Eastern Orthodox and constitute approximately one-third of the population.

Due to the country's nomadic and Soviet past, many residents describe themselves as nonbelievers. Data from a 1998 government survey suggest that 80 percent of ethnic Kazakhs consider themselves nominally Muslim, while only 60 percent of ethnic Slavs accept the Orthodox Christian designation. The Kazakhstani Association of Sociologists and Political Analysts has estimated that approximately 20 to 25 percent of adults practice a religious faith. A large proportion of devout Muslims traditionally live in southern regions, bordering Uzbekistan and largely ethnic Uzbeks.

According to government statistics in 2003, evangelical Christian and Baptist congregations outnumber Russian Orthodox, although it is unlikely that the number of adherents is also higher. Other Protestant associations with a sizable number of congregations include Lutherans (traditionally practiced by Kazakhstani Germans who still account for approximately 2 percent of the population, despite sizable emigration), Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Pentecostals.

A small Jewish community, estimated at well below 1 percent of the population, has synagogues in several larger cities. There is a Catholic archdiocese, adherents of which account for a similarly small proportion of the population.

Foreign missionaries are most active in the southern regions of the country and often come from Turkey, Pakistan, and other predominantly Muslim countries. According to government statistics, there were 275 foreign missionaries in the country at the end of the reporting period; others are present under tourist visas and not registered with the Government as missionaries.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the various denominations worship largely without government interference; however, local officials attempt on occasion to limit the practice of religion by some nontraditional groups. The Constitution defines the country as a secular state and grants the right to everyone to decline indicating a religious affiliation.

The National Religion Law, in contrast to laws governing other public associations, does not require religious organizations to register with the Government. It states that all persons are free to practice their religion "alone or together with others." Because the clause makes no reference to registration, many legal experts and government officials interpret it to ensure the right of members of unregistered groups to practice their religion. However, the law does specify that those religious organizations that wish to receive legal status must register. Registration requires a group to have at least 10 members and submit an application to the Ministry of Justice. Religious organizations must have legal status in order to buy or rent real property, hire employees, or engage in other legal transactions.

Article 375 of the Administrative Code allows authorities to suspend the activities or fine the leaders of unregistered religious organizations. Legal experts disagree about whether Article 375 supercedes the National Religion Law on the obligation of religious groups to register. Government officials also have varying interpretations of the discrepancy between the Administrative Code and the Religion Law. Lower courts have cited Article 375 in sanctioning religious organizations for non-registration, but fewer cases under this charge were brought during the reporting period than in the past, due to the body of such decisions that have been overturned on appeal. One religious rights activist estimated that more than 80 percent of cases brought on Article 375 violations are dismissed, either by prosecutors, lower courts, or on appeal.

In practice local officials, particularly in remote locations, often insist that religious organizations register at the local level. However, neither law nor regulation grants such officials the authority to register a religious group. Only the Ministry of Justice, which has branches at the national and oblast levels, may legally register a group. Although the law specifies a maximum of 30 days for authorities to complete the registration process, many religious groups have reported delays of several months.

The national Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center reported that they have attempted unsuccessfully since 1997 to register in Northern Kazakhstan Oblast. On November 21, 2002, a city court in the oblast ordered the Ministry's oblast branch to resolve the delay. The Ministry branch appealed for guidance in January to the Ministry's national headquarters. In June, the latter ordered the branch to submit the Jehovah's Witnesses' documents for registration and chastised it for repeated failure to follow the law. The Jehovah's Witnesses were still not registered in the oblast at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Jehovah's Witnesses' May 2001 application to register in Atyrau Oblast was formally turned down in April, whereupon the Jehovah's Witnesses resubmitted it. Their December 2001 application to register in Akmolinsk Oblast also remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report. The group is already formally registered nationally and in the country's other 11 oblasts.

The Government made no attempt during the period covered by this report to settle the discrepancy between the National Religion Law and the Administrative Code. Previously, it had offered a new religion law or draft amendments as a means to reconcile the inconsistency. The last time the Government took such action was in November 2001 when it submitted to Parliament amendments that included registration requirements for religious groups. In 2002 Parliament passed them, despite several objections raised by international experts and religious organizations, but the Constitutional Council rejected them after determining that certain provisions were unconstitutional.

The Constitutional Council specifically ruled that the provision requiring the Muslim Spiritual Association (a national Muslim organization headed by the Chief Mufti) to approve the registration of any Muslim group violated the constitutional principle separating church and state. The Council also noted more broadly that the amendments might infringe on the constitutional right to spread religious beliefs freely. Other provisions of the amendments not specifically ruled unconstitutional included: Requiring that religious organizations be registered; banning "extremist religious associations;" increasing the membership required for registration from 10 to 50 persons; authorizing local officials to suspend the activities of religious groups for criminal violations of 1 or more of their members, or for conducting religious ac-

tivity outside of the place where they are registered; and requiring that foreign religious organizations be affiliated with a nationally registered organization. President Nazarbayev chose not to challenge the Council's April 2002 ruling; such a challenge would have required the Council to uphold its ruling by a two-thirds vote. The Government has proposed no new religious legislation since that time.

Neither law nor regulation prohibits foreign missionary activity; however, there is no mechanism governing such activity. In 2001, in anticipation of passage of amendments to the Religion Law, the Government annulled the previous regulation setting out procedures for the registration of foreign missionaries. Since then there have been widespread reports of inconsistency at the local level regarding the length of validity and cost of visas for foreign missionaries. Government officials maintain that the regulation cancelled in 2001 will be reinstated; however, there remained no such regulation at the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government exempted registered religious organizations from taxes on church collections and income from certain religious activities. The Government has donated buildings and provided other assistance for the construction of new mosques, synagogues, and Russian Orthodox churches.

The Government invited the national leaders of the two largest religious groups, Islam and Russian Orthodoxy, to participate jointly in some state events; Catholic and Jewish leaders have been included in such events as well. Leaders of other faiths, including Baptists, Adventists, and other nontraditional religious groups, have at times also participated in some events; events organized by the city administration in Almaty exclude no religions.

No religious holidays are state holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The President and other senior officials continue to regard with concern the presence of what they consider religious extremism; however, unlike in previous years, none of them have publicly discussed the issue of registration of religious groups during the reporting period. Law enforcement authorities conducted inspections of religious groups throughout the country, claiming the right to do so as a means of preventing the development of religious extremism and ensuring that religious groups pay taxes. These inspections also provided the authorities with information about the registration status of the groups being inspected, which in some cases led to suspensions pending the registration of the groups concerned.

The Government typically claims that religious groups' charters do not meet the requirements of the law when refusing or significantly delaying registration for some religious groups. Often authorities cite discrepancies between Russian and Kazakh language versions of groups' charters or refer charters for expert examination. In addition, because the law does not allow religious groups to engage in educating children without approval from the Ministry of Education, applications for religions whose charters include such activities often are refused.

The national Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Center alleged continuing incidents of harassment by a number of local governments. It claimed that city officials in Kostanay, Karaganda, Aktubinsk, Petropavlovsk, Atyrau, Kokshetau, Pavlodar, Semipalatinsk, and Taraz denied the group permits to rent stadiums or other large public or private sites for religious meetings during the reporting period. However, the Center also reported that such denials were inconsistent and that officials in these and other jurisdictions have at times granted such permits. No other religious groups have reported similar instances of permits being denied.

During the period covered by this report, local KGB or police officials disrupted some meetings in private homes of unregistered groups of Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestants, Adventists, Baptists, and other nontraditional groups throughout the country.

During the reporting period, the number of court cases against unregistered local Jehovah's Witness congregations throughout the country declined. Leaders of Baptist organizations reported a similar decline, and religious rights activists regard the situation as improving. Courts that still issued administrative injunctions against unregistered religious groups issued warnings, levied fines of \$50 or less, or suspended the activities of the group. When adequate legal counsel was brought in on appeal, the decisions most often were overturned.

In May police in the Zharminskiy region of Eastern Kazakhstan Oblast opened a criminal case against Baptist pastor Sergey Nizhegorodtsev. He was charged with nonpayment of a fine levied on him in February 2002 by the Zharminskiy District Court for failure to register his congregation. However, Zharminskiy prosecutors dropped the case on May 28, agreeing with Nizhegorodtsev's assertion that the February 2002 court decision had been illegal.

Another Baptist pastor in Eastern Kazakhstan Oblast, Pavel Leonov, was convicted of failing to uphold a court order. In November 2001 the Ayaguz District Court ruled that Leonov did not comply with a September 2000 court order requiring his church to register. He was assessed a fine of approximately \$135 (20,575 tenge). By the end of the period covered by this report, Leonov had not paid the fine and authorities had made no attempt to collect it. Leonov did not appeal his case to a higher court.

In October 2001, a court in Kyzyl-Orda sentenced a Baptist church pastor, Valery Pak, to 5 days in prison for failing to comply with a 2000 court order that had suspended the church's activities until it was registered.

The Zharminskiy, Kyzyl-Orda, and Ayaguz congregations belong to the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians and Baptists, which has a policy of not seeking or accepting registration in former Soviet countries. Police and prosecutors also sought to suspend the activities of Baptist churches associated with the Council in Aktobe, Pavlodar, and Eastern Kazakhstan Oblasts.

Government officials frequently expressed concerns regarding the potential spread of religious extremism in the south of the country. The KNB has characterized the fight against "religious extremism" as a top priority of the internal intelligence service. International organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, often remind the Government that religious extremism should be addressed by the Criminal Code and that no legislation restricting religious groups is justified on security grounds. Local religious rights advocates also have made this point in appeals to the Government and have lobbied for no restrictions to be placed on the fundamental right of religious freedom. Nonetheless, observers contend that security officials informally monitor religious activity, including imams' sermons.

Foreign missionary activity is not prohibited by law. The Constitution requires foreign religious associations to conduct their activities, including appointing the heads of religious associations, "in coordination with appropriate state institutions." Foreign missionaries legally are entitled to register religious organizations; however, they generally also are required to list a majority of local citizens among the 10 founders of the organization. Other foreign missionaries have complained of occasional harassment by low-level government officials. In particular, evangelical Protestants working in schools, hospitals, and other social service institutions have alleged government obstruction of their efforts to proselytize.

The 2001 annulment of the regulation of foreign missionary activity has led to widespread reports of inconsistency in the rules applied to foreign citizens engaged in religious work. Some local jurisdictions continue to register foreign citizens as religious workers; however, in many cases foreign missionaries who have entered the country on tourist visas engage in religious activities. Travel agencies have reported difficulty in obtaining ordinary tourist visas for persons whom they say the Government suspects of entering the country to conduct missionary work. The duration and cost of temporary visas varies by jurisdiction. When the Government knows or suspects the visa is for the purpose of conducting religious work, the Government often requires foreign missionaries to produce lengthy documentation regarding their affiliated church. Other religious rights activists have claimed that local officials use the lack of legal protection for missionaries as a pretext to extract bribes for registration. Although government officials have promised to reinstate procedures to accredit and register foreign missionaries, no such regulation had been promulgated by the end of the period covered by this report.

In early March, police in the town of Arys in Southern Kazakhstan Oblast briefly detained a missionary with the New Life Church, Nurbay Arystanov, and reportedly threatened to confiscate his property. Police had objected to the fact that Arystanov, although a citizen of the country, was not formally resident in the town. Later in the same month, an oblast official traveled with Arystanov to the town and told local police they had erred. Police apologized to Arystanov, who considered the matter resolved.

In November 2002, officials in Southern Kazakhstan Oblast refused to grant a visa extension to Sayid Bukhari, a foreign missionary with the Akhmadi Muslim Community. Bukhari had worked in the country for four and a half years without such problems. Bukhari stayed in the country with uncertain status and was granted a 3-month visa in January. After local authorities again threatened not to renew his visa at the conclusion of that term, the Akhmadis reported that the local officials received orders from their superiors to relent and to grant Bukhari a longer-term visa.

Both the Government and the national Muslim organization deny that there is any official connection between them. However, the Government has proposed several times in the form of amendments to the Religion Law, that the organization

assume a quasi-official role by determining which Muslim groups be allowed to register with authorities and by approving the construction of new mosques. In April 2002, the Constitutional Council ruled that these provisions of the proposed amendments were unconstitutional.

Unlike in previous years, no religious organization, other than the Hare Krishnas, reported during the period covered by this report that they had been the subject of a news account portraying them or nontraditional religions in general as a threat to security or society. The Hare Krishnas reported that they intend to sue several media outlets for defamation based on news coverage of them as a threat to Christian and Muslim values.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Authorities maintain that Hizb ut-Tahrir, which advocates the practice of its interpretation of "pure" Islamic doctrine and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia, is an extremist group. On several occasions during the period covered by this report, authorities detained their members for distributing literature. In most cases, the individuals were held in custody for a brief period and then eventually released.

At the end of the period covered by this report, two alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members, Asan Shagibayev and Baurzhan Kultayev, were scheduled to face criminal charges in an Almaty court for distributing Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets in June 2002. In February the court referred the case back to police for additional investigation. Both men denied the charges against them and maintained that the KNB manufactured the cases. Kultayev further alleged in a complaint filed with the Almaty prosecutor that KNB officials had beaten him.

In 2001, according to local press reports, local KNB officials in Southern Kazakhstan Oblast beat 21-year-old Kanat Biyembitov to death after they detained him for allegedly belonging to the Hizb ut-Tahrir group. The Government concluded that two KNB officials bore some responsibility for the death and stated that it had released them from their duties; however, no criminal action had been taken by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Society for Krishna Consciousness alleged that in early 2003 the Karasay District prosecutor filed suit against them for irregularities in their registration documents. The prosecutor asked the district court to revoke their registration, but the court threw out the lawsuit on April 18 as groundless. The Krishnas further alleged that other officials have pressured them to renounce their registration. On May 18, 2002, the Krishnas' application for registration in Almaty Oblast was approved, after an 8-month delay. The Krishnas, registered only in Almaty City and Almaty Oblast, plan to apply for national registration.

In April 2002, regional authorities raided an unregistered farm run by the Society for Krishna Consciousness in the village of Yeltay, in the Karasay District of Almaty Oblast. Tax, immigration, fire, and health and hygiene officials all were involved in the inspection. Police confiscated the passports of 15 foreign members of the community, 5 of whom were sentenced to deportation at a May 2002 local court hearing, at which no charges were stated and the lawyers for the accused were not permitted to speak. In early June 2002, the Hare Krishnas appealed the deportations and the court also levied fines against three other members. Ultimately no members were deported. Leaders of the Krishna Center, registered in Almaty City, alleged that the authorities arrived for the April inspection with television camera crews and then ordered the stations to report on the raid. In one television report, the Krishnas were described as extremists and criminals.

There were no reports of the prolonged detention of members of religious organizations for proselytizing. On occasion the authorities took action against groups engaged in proselytizing; however, such actions were limited to the confiscation of religious literature and brief detentions.

Other than the brief detentions of a New Life missionary in Arys and several Hizb ut-Tahrir members, there were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversions

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

National and regional officials have become more proactive in stopping restrictions on religious freedom and harassment of religious groups by local officials. Several of the cases cited in this report illustrate this trend, including the Ministry of Justice intervention on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses' application for registration in Northern Kazakhstan Oblast, Zharminskiy prosecutors' decision to drop

criminal charges against Baptist pastor Sergey Nizhegorodtsev, and action to assure that the legitimate missionary activities of Nurbay Arystanov in Arys were allowed to continue. In at least the last of these cases, the offending officials apologized to the group they had harassed. During the period covered by this report, courts have been less willing to sanction religious groups or suspend their activities for not being registered. Prosecutors brought such cases to the courts less often than in previous years.

In February President Nazarbayev launched an initiative called “Peace and Harmony,” which was intended to open a dialog among religions and cultures. The President invited regional heads of state, international Muslim and Jewish leaders, and representatives of many of the country’s religious faiths to a conference highlighting the need for interfaith understanding. The Government has stated that it intends to continue supporting the initiative with future conferences, expanding the number of international religious delegations invited.

In May the Government supported a conference to establish a branch office of the International Association of Religious Freedom. National and Almaty officials attended the conference and representatives of all religions were invited.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The country is multiethnic, with a long tradition of tolerance and secularism. Since independence the number of mosques and churches has increased greatly. There exists general wariness within the population, particularly in rural areas, of nontraditional religions.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officers are proactive in reminding government officials of these commitments and have also pressed the Government to resolve the legal uncertainty surrounding the registration of religious groups and the status of missionaries. The Embassy’s human rights officer maintains contact with a broad range of religious communities and reports on instances of 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 the U.S.

In April the Embassy sponsored a 2-day visit of a U.S. academic expert on Islam to conduct a series of programs in Southern Kazakhstan Oblast on the role of Islam in a secular society. The scholar met with religious, academic, and NGO leaders and lectured at universities. From the beginning of 2003, the Embassy also distributed several hundred Russian- and Kazakh-language copies of a publication discussing Muslim life in a multicultural and interfaith society.

In October 2002, the Embassy sponsored the visit to the United States of the leader of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims—the Chief Mufti—and one of his senior aides. The program of the visit included meetings with U.S. government officials, academics, NGO leaders, and representatives of multiple U.S. religious organizations. The Embassy also sponsored the 2-week visit to the United States in April of a group of 20 Imams and other Muslim religious leaders from the south of the country. Their program included meetings with a variety of religious organizations, U.S. government officials, academics, and NGO leaders. They were also hosted by U.S. families and participated in religious services. Upon their return to the country, the group produced a multimedia presentation of their visit and presented it to numerous audiences.

In February the U.S. Embassy helped provide logistical support for the visit of a 50-member delegation of Jewish leaders who traveled to the country to participate in the Peace and Harmony conference.

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government restricts the activities of radical Islamic groups that it considers to be threats to national stability. The Constitution provides for a secular state and the separation of church and state. The Government does not support any one religion.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued steps to monitor and restrict Islamist groups that it considers a threat to the country.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 76,600 square miles, and its population is approximately 5 million. The latest official statistical data from the National Statistics Committee reflected the following ethnic breakdown of the population: 66.3 percent were Kyrgyz, 14 percent were Uzbeks, 11.2 percent were Russians, 1.1 percent were Dungans (ethnic Chinese Muslims), 1 percent were Uighurs; and 6.4 percent were other ethnicities.

Islam is the most widely practiced faith. Official sources estimate that up to 80 percent of the inhabitants are Muslims. The majority of Muslims are Sunni and there are only a few Shi'a (approximately 1,000). According to the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA), as of June there were an estimated 1,600 mosques in the country, of which 1,042 are registered. There also are six institutes for higher Islamic teaching. A Soviet-era estimate found that approximately 17 percent of the population were Russian Orthodox; there are no official post-independence figures. The country has 43 Russian Orthodox churches, and 1 Russian Orthodox monastery. The Seventh-day Adventist Church operates 18 churches throughout the country. Jews, Buddhists, and Catholics account for approximately 3 percent of the population, and their adherents practice their religions openly in one synagogue, one temple, and three churches. In addition, there are 216 registered Protestant houses of worship and 12 registered Baha'i houses of worship. The small Jewish congregation in Bishkek organizes informal cultural studies and humanitarian services, chiefly food assistance for its elderly. There also are examples of syncretistic religious practices. Most notably, there is a Baptist church in the Naryn region whose followers are predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz. While they worship as Christians, they have incorporated Muslim modes of prayer into their Christian rituals. There is no official estimate of the number of atheists in the population.

Islam is practiced widely throughout the country in both the urban and rural areas. Russian Orthodoxy typically is concentrated in the cities in which a larger ethnic Russian population exists. The other faiths also are practiced more commonly in the cities where their smaller communities tend to be concentrated. There is a correlation between ethnicity and religion; ethnic Kyrgyz primarily are Muslims, while ethnic Russians usually belong to either the Russian Orthodox Church or one of the Protestant denominations. Exact statistics are not available, but while the majority of the population claims to follow Islam, a significant number of these adherents appear to be only nominal believers and identify with the faith out of historical or ethnic allegiance. A significant number of the followers of the Russian Orthodox Church also appear to be only nominal believers.

A number of missionary groups operate in the country. The SCRA has registered missionaries from the Republic of Korea, the United States, Germany, Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. They represent an estimated 20 denominations including Islam, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unified Church of Christ of Evangelists, and Korean Presbyterians. According to the SCRA, approximately 1,000 missionaries work in the country, of whom approximately 800 are Christian. In the last 5 years more than 700 foreign missionaries were registered. However, according to official statistics, since independence, authorities ordered approximately 20 missionaries who disseminated dogma inconsistent with the traditional customs of Kyrgyz Muslims to leave the country. Information on the religion of these missionaries was not available by the end of the period covered by this report.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and the law provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right; however, the Government restricted this right in practice, in particular for Islamic groups it considered to be a threat to the country. The Constitution provides for a secular state and for the separation of church and state, and the Government does not support any one religion. Article 8 of the Constitution forbids the formation of political parties on religious and ethnic grounds, as well as activities of religious organizations that jeopardize the state, constitu-

tional system, or national security. Article 82 of the Constitution provides the Constitutional Court with the authority to determine the constitutionality of religious organizations.

The SCRA promotes religious tolerance, protects freedom of conscience, and oversees laws on religion. A 1997 Presidential Decree requires the registration of all religious organizations with the SCRA, which in turn must recognize the registrant as a religious organization. Organizations applying for registration must submit an application form, an organizational charter, minutes of an institutional meeting, and a list of individuals founding the organization. Members must include at least 10 adult citizens. Each congregation must register separately. A religious organization then must complete the registration process with the Ministry of Justice in order 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 accordance with the tax code. In practice the Ministry never has registered a religious organization without prior registration by the SCRA. The registration process often is cumbersome, taking 1 month on average, but sometimes several years. The SCRA claims that it has refused registration to only one organization, the Russian Overseas Church, after a court held that it was not a religious organization. However, the SCRA has returned some applications numerous times for correction and re-submission. According to SCRA regulations, registration is rejected if a religious organization does not comply with laws or is a threat to national security, social stability, interethnic and interdenominational harmony, public order, health, or morality. Applicants whose registration is rejected may re-apply and appeal to the courts. Unregistered religious organizations are prohibited from conducting activities.

According to the SCRA, there are more than 1,300 registered religious entities, including mosques, churches, foundations, and nongovernmental organizations of a religious nature. Of these registered entities, 237 are Christian. In the past, several religious organizations, including the Catholic Church, have reported difficulty registering with the SCRA. Almost all were eventually registered, although sometimes after a lengthy delay. As many as 55 small Christian churches that were having difficulty in 2001 were able to complete registration during 2002. A total of 133 religious organizations were registered during the period covered by the report.

The country's Roman Catholic Church, approximately 80 percent of whose members are citizens, was considered an unregistered foreign religious organization in the country until its registration in 2002. The Roman Catholic Church in Bishkek first attained legal status under Soviet law in 1969; however, the SCRA notified the church that it would have to reregister as a foreign religion in the country after the issuance of Presidential Decree 319 in 1996. The Holy See established the Catholic Mission in the country in 1997, and a representative from the Vatican visited the country in 2001 to meet with SCRA members on behalf of registration. In February 2002, the SCRA approved the Catholic Mission's application for registration, and registration was finalized in October 2002. The Unification Church, which is registered as a social, rather than a religious, organization, has "semi-official" status. According to the SCRA, the Unification Church has not applied for registration as a religious organization. However, an affiliated organization is registered as a NGO.

The Church of Jesus Christ, the country's largest Protestant church with approximately 30 affiliates and approximately 9,500 members, of whom 30 percent are ethnic Kyrgyz, reported ongoing delays in registering several of its regional branches with the SCRA. In May the church's branch in Osh was closed by authorities for operating without registration, despite repeated submissions and rejections of applications.

Missionary groups of a variety of faiths operate freely, although they are required to register with the Government.

The Government expressly forbids the teaching of religion (or atheism) in public schools. In 2001 the Government instructed the SCRA to draw up programs for training clergy and to prepare methodologies for the teaching of religion in public schools. These instructions came in response to concerns about the spread of Wahhabism and what the Government considers unconventional religious sects. The SCRA turned to a number of religious organizations for their ideas on introducing religious education in schools. The reaction of the organizations generally was negative, as they preferred to retain responsibility for the religious education of their adherents. The SCRA is developing a program to teach about various religions, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and several academic institutions. However, the program was not implemented by the end of the report due to lack of funding. During the period covered by this report, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Kyrgyz Republic, or Muftiate, in cooperation with the SCRA, conducted pro-

grams to educate followers of Islam about negative aspects of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Volunteers visited villages in the south of the country to teach traditional Islamic values.

In April Muslim leaders and Government officials agreed to grant the Islamic Institute the status of a university, which will give it authority over other Islamic institutes in the country and allow it to develop a more standardized curriculum.

The Government recognizes three Muslim holidays (Noorus, Kurban Ait, and Orozo Ait) and one Russian Orthodox holiday (Christmas, which is observed on January 7 in accordance with the Russian Orthodox calendar) as national holidays. The President and the Government send greetings to the followers of the Muslim and Orthodox faiths on their major religious holidays, and the greetings are printed in the mass media.

The Government works through the SCRA to promote interfaith dialog and encourage religious tolerance. The SCRA hosts meetings of religious groups to bring the faiths together in open forums. The SCRA assists various faiths in working together on programs for the protection of the poor and the elderly.

Since 2001, the Government has worked with representatives of various religious faiths and NGOs on a draft law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," which is ostensibly a response to concerns about terrorism and other illegal activities committed by groups disguising themselves as religious organizations. The initial draft included compulsory registration of religious bodies, a prohibition against unregistered religious activity, the lack of an alternative to military service, and tight control over religious activity deemed "destructive." The Parliament worked with the OSCE to revise the draft law in an effort to ensure that it respected the Government's OSCE obligations and would allow free practice of religion by all faiths. In 2002, the draft law was being revised to tighten regulations on missionary activities. Representatives of the religious communities remain cautious and there is concern that some Muslim believers could be labeled extremists under this law. The latest draft proposes that religious organizations register only with the Ministry of Justice and reflects new constitutional changes following the February 2 referendum. At the end of the period covered by this report, the draft law had not been submitted for debate in Parliament.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government is 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 southern part of the country, and fears that Islamists seek to overthrow the secular government and establish an Islamic theocracy. Armed incursions of Islamic militants 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 its followers, particularly militant Islamic groups. Presidential Decree Number 319 states that a religious organization may be denied registration or its registration may be suspended if the organization's activities do not comply with the law or are dangerous to state security, social stability, inter-ethnic and interconfessional relations, or the health and morals of citizens. Such suspensions or refusals of a religious organization's registration are subject to judicial appeal. In May there were reports that local officials closed eight mosques in Suzak district, near Jalalabad.

In May 2001, the Procurator General proposed amending the Criminal Code to include tougher sentences for those convicted of "religious extremism." During the period covered by this report, the Government continued to express public concern about groups that it viewed as extremist with either radical religious or political agendas. In September 2002, senior law enforcement officials testified in Parliament that the primary danger to the state came from religious extremists.

Hizb ut-Tahrir, primarily active in the southern part of the country, is not registered with the Government, which considers it an extremist organization and therefore its activities to be illegal. In October 2002, the Chairman of the SCRA estimated that there were approximately 2,000 followers of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the country. The Muftiate issued a fatwa (legal decree) denouncing the activity of Hizb ut-Tahrir in December 2002.

In December 2002, the Muftiate announced the formation of an expert commission to review and standardize Islamic educational literature printed and distributed in the country, the construction of mosques, and activity of Islamic groups.

Religious leaders note with concern that the SCRA frequently uses the term national security in its statements. Law enforcement authorities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the National Security Service (SNB), often play a role in investigating religious organizations and resolving inter-religious disputes.

The Church of Jesus Christ reported experiencing a number of bureaucratic and legal problems during the period covered by the report. These included difficulties

in obtaining title to the land on which the church is located, delays in registration and obtaining permission to hold Easter services at Bishkek's main sports stadium, and official demands for payment of back taxes.

During the period covered by the report, there were no reports of further incidents of village elders calling for the expulsion of Christian converts as occurred in earlier years.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The arrest and prosecution of persons accused of possessing and distributing literature of Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to increase during the period covered by the report, although overall figures for 2002 were lower than for 2001. Most arrests occurred in the south and involved ethnic Uzbeks. In 2002, authorities reported that Hizb ut-Tahrir members were apprehended in the north of the country for the first time. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), which monitors Hizb ut-Tahrir, the number of criminal cases against Hizb ut-Tahrir members dropped to 41 in 2002 after spiking at 86 in 2001. The MVD reported that during 2002, 49 Hizb ut-Tahrir-related cases were investigated by authorities, 50 persons were detained for Hizb ut-Tahrir membership and distribution of its literature, and criminal proceedings were initiated against 41 individuals. During the first six months of the year, 80 Hizb ut-Tahrir related cases were investigated, 71 persons were detained, and criminal proceedings were initiated against 49 individuals. Those arrested typically were charged with violation of Article 299 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits the distribution of literature inciting ethnic, racial, or religious hatred. In July 2002, two Islamic activists in the southern city of Osh were sentenced to 5 years in prison for distributing and possessing Hizb ut-Tahrir materials. In June two brothers in Jalalabad Oblast were sentenced to three-year prison terms for their alleged activities as Hizb ut-Tahrir members.

There were no other reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Members of the two major religions, Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church, respect each other's major holidays and exchange holiday greetings.

There is no evidence of widespread societal discrimination or violence against members of different religious groups. However, there is evidence of periodic tension in rural areas between conservative Muslims and foreign missionaries and individuals from traditionally Muslim ethnic groups who convert to other faiths. Both Muslim and Russian Orthodox spiritual leaders criticized the proselytizing activities of nontraditional Christian groups. SCRA officials also expressed concern about an influx of nontraditional religious groups and the possibility of resulting social tensions.

In March 2002, members of the country's Jewish Cultural Society reported that they had heard calls for violence against Jews issued in Russian and Kyrgyz from a loudspeaker at a mosque in central Bishkek. The Government investigated the incident and mosque leaders apologized to members of the Jewish Cultural Society. There were no reports of further incidents of this kind during the period covered by the report.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy continued to monitor the progress of the draft law on religion and maintained contact with government officials with regard to religious affairs. In April and June, Embassy representatives discussed with government officials the problems experienced by the Church of Jesus Christ. At numerous times during the period covered by the report, Embassy representatives met with leaders of religious communities in the country, including minority groups, and with NGOs monitoring religious freedom. In December 2002, the Ambassador hosted an annual Iftaar dinner for Muslim leaders and government officials.

Throughout the period covered by the report, the Public Affairs section actively distributed publications about Muslim life in the United States. In May it funded

a group from Osh TV to travel to the U.S. to film a documentary about Muslim life in America. A group of Muslim leaders traveled to the U.S. on an International Visitors' Program on religious tolerance in June. During his visit, the Head Mufti and his Deputy met with U.S. Government officials.

LATVIA

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

There was no change in the status of religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, bureaucratic problems persist for some minority religions.

The generally amicable relations among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, lingering suspicions remain towards newer nontraditional faiths.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 25,000 square miles, and its population is estimated at 2.4 million. The three largest faiths are Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Orthodox Christianity. No precise denominational membership statistics are available. Sizeable religious minorities include Baptists, Pentecostals, and various evangelical Protestant groups. The once large Jewish community was virtually destroyed in the Holocaust during the 1941–44 German occupation and now totals only an estimated 6,000 persons.

As of February, the Justice Ministry had registered 1098 congregations. This total included: Lutheran (307), Roman Catholic (252), Orthodox (117), Baptist (90), Old Believer Orthodox (67), Seventh-day Adventist (47), Jehovah's Witnesses (12), Methodist (12), Jewish (13), Buddhist (5), Muslim (5), Hare Krishna (10), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (3), and more than 100 other congregations. In 2003 the Government also registered the Christian Scientists as a recognized religious congregation.

Interest in religion has increased markedly since independence. However, a large percentage of these adherents do not practice their faith regularly. In 2002 Churches provided the following estimates of church membership to the Justice Ministry: Lutherans (400,000), Roman Catholics (500,000), Orthodox (300,000), Baptists (6,000), Old Believer Orthodox (70,000), Seventh-day Adventists (4,000), Jehovah's Witnesses (2,000), Methodists (500), Jews (6,000), Buddhists (100), Muslims (300), Hare Krishnas (500), and Mormons (2,000). There are significant numbers of atheists, perhaps a majority of the population. Orthodox Christians, many of them Russian-speaking, non-citizen, permanent residents, are concentrated in the major cities, while many Catholics live in the east.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, bureaucratic problems persist for some minority religions. There is no state religion; however, the Government distinguishes between "traditional" (Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believers, Baptists, and Jewish) and "new" religions.

Although the Government does not require the registration of religious groups, the 1995 Law on Religious Organizations accords religious organizations certain rights and privileges when they register, such as status as a separate legal entity for owning property or other financial transactions, as well as tax benefits for donors. Registration also eases the rules for public gatherings.

According to the Law on Religious Organizations, any 20 citizens or permanent residents over the age of 18 may apply to register a church. Asylum seekers, foreign Embassy staff, and those in the country temporarily in a special status may not register a religious organization. Congregations functioning in the country for the first time that do not belong to a church association already registered must reregister each year for 10 years. Ten or more congregations of the same denomination and with permanent registration status may form a religious association. Only churches

with religious association status may establish theological schools or monasteries. A decision to register a church is made by the Minister of Justice. According to Ministry of Justice officials, most registration applications are approved eventually once proper documents are submitted; however, the law does not permit the simultaneous registration of more than one religious union (church) in a single confession, and the Government occasionally denies applications on this basis.

Property restitution has been completed substantially. The status of the remaining properties is unclear and is the subject of complicated legal and bureaucratic processes.

Citizens' passports indicate the ethnicity of the bearer. For example, Jews are considered an ethnic group and are listed as such rather than as Latvian or Russian.

December 25 is celebrated as Christmas and is a recognized national holiday. Good Friday and Easter Monday also are national holidays. The Orthodox Church wants the Government to recognize Orthodox Christmas, but the government had not adopted this plan by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Latvian Lutheran Church established its own clergy education center, the Luther Academy in Riga, in 1998. The Roman Catholic Church also has its own seminary. The University of Latvia's theological faculty is nondenominational.

There are three councils that comment on religious issues for the Government. The New Religions Consultative Council consists of doctors, academics, and the independent human rights ombudsman. It meets on an "ad hoc" basis and offers opinions on specific issues, but it does not have decision-making authority. The Traditional Religion Council aims at facilitating greater ecumenical communication, discussing matters of common concern and improving dialogue between the traditional faiths and the Government. In the past, it has convened monthly, but it is now being replaced by a new organization called the Ecclesiastical Council. This new council was organized by the previous Prime Minister in 2002 and is chaired by either the sitting Prime Minister or the Deputy Prime Minister. It includes representatives from the major churches: Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Orthodox, Jewish, Adventist, Methodist, and Old Believers.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Problems arise and registration is denied because the Law on Religious Organizations does not permit simultaneous registration of more than one religious union (church) in a single confession, and the Government occasionally denies groups registration. Because of this provision, the Government does not register any splinter groups, including an independent Jewish congregation, the Latvian Free Orthodox Church, and a separate Old Believers group.

Visa regulations effective since 1999 require religious workers to present either an ordination certificate or evidence of religious education that corresponds to a Latvian bachelor's degree in theology. The visa application process still is cumbersome. While the Government generally was cooperative in assisting to resolve difficult visa cases in favor of missionary workers, problems still persist. An American religious worker is appealing the denial of a visa in 2002 to the European court of Human Rights. The Government has allowed the religious worker to remain in the country during the appeal.

Foreign evangelists and missionaries, including from the United States, are permitted to hold meetings and to proselytize, but the law stipulates that only domestic religious organizations may invite them to conduct such activities. Foreign religious denominations have criticized this provision.

The Law on Religious Organizations stipulates that religion may be taught to students in public schools on a voluntary basis only by representatives of Evangelical Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Old Believer, Baptist, and Jewish religions. The Government provides funds for this education. Students at state-supported national minority schools also may receive education on the religion "characteristic of the national minority" on a voluntary basis. Other denominations may provide religious education in private schools only. The Government was debating whether or not to mandate Christian religious instruction (parents would have the opportunity to opt for ethics class instead) in primary schools by the end of the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations between the various religious communities are generally amicable. Ecumenism still is a new concept in the country, and traditional religions have adopted a distinctly reserved attitude towards the concept. Although government officials encourage a broader understanding and acceptance of newer religions, suspicions remain towards newer nontraditional faiths.

The Latvian Historical Commission, under the sponsorship of President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, has continued to promote Holocaust awareness throughout all elements of society. In 2003 a commission to honor Zanis Lipke, a Latvian who helped save dozens of Riga Jews during World War II, formed to develop a memorial.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Embassy worked to support the principle of religious freedom by engaging in regular exchanges with appropriate government bodies, including the Director of the Office of Religious Affairs, human rights nongovernmental organizations, and representatives of various religious confessions, including missionaries. The Embassy's Consular Section also held regular discussions with local immigration authorities and section meetings with the Department of Religious Affairs.

The Embassy actively supports the Latvian Historical Commission. It has funded the travel of Latvian scholars to the United States for education in ethnic and religious tolerance and of U.S. experts to Latvia for Historical Commission activities. The Embassy also sponsored a series of academic exchanges and lectures on Holocaust issues, and is supporting the Zanis Lipke memorial project and a mass graves research effort organized by the Jewish Museum in Riga.

Embassy officials maintain an open and productive dialog with the Government's Director of the Office of Religious Affairs. Embassy officials also meet regularly with visiting missionary groups as well as representatives of different religious confessions, both Latvian and foreign. Problems that members of certain minority religions have experienced at the Citizenship and Migration Department when seeking visas and residency permits often are discussed. Embassy contacts believe that the denial of a visa to an American religious worker was not religiously motivated. The Government has allowed the religious worker to remain in the country during the appeal.

LIECHTENSTEIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Roman Catholic Church is the official state church.

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of 61.7 square miles (160 square kilometers) and a total population of 32,883 (as of June 30, 2002, according to the Office of the National Economy). There are 25,676 Roman Catholics, 2,348 Protestants, 1,347 Muslims, 254 Eastern Orthodox, 70 Buddhists, 32 members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 13 Anglicans, 17 Jews, 14 Baha'is, 8 New Apostolics, 8 members of other religions, and 3,569 persons who were undecided.

There are no significant foreign missionary groups in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of creed and conscience, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives

to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Criminal Code prohibits any form of discrimination, or debasement of any religion or any of its adherents. The Constitution provides for the Catholic Church as the established church of the country and as such it enjoys the full protection of the State.

Church funding comes from the general budget, as decided by Parliament, and is not a direct "tithe" paid by the citizens. The Government gives money not only to the Catholic Church but also to other denominations. The budget is allocated proportionately according to membership numbers. The Roman Catholic Church's finances are integrated directly into the budgets of the national and local governments. The Catholic Church receives approximately \$190,000 (300,000 Swiss francs) per year, plus additional sums from the 11 communes. The relationship between the State and the Roman Catholic Church is being redefined. Under an interim regulation of December 1998, the state contributions to the Catholic Church temporarily had been paid into a blocked special account to be released when a new agreement was reached. The 1998 regulation expired on January 1, 2002, before a consensus had been reached. Therefore, the Church again is entitled to the State's annual contributions under the terms of a 1987 law. The Government missed its self-imposed 2002 deadline because it wanted to allow additional time to find the widest possible consensus on the redefinition of the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church. The State's financial contributions for 1999, 2000, and 2001 have been paid out to the Church. All religious groups enjoy tax-exempt status.

There are no significant foreign missionary groups in the country. In order to receive a religious-worker visa, an applicant must demonstrate that the host organization is important for the entire country. An applicant must have completed theological studies and be accredited with an acknowledged order. Visa requests normally are not denied and are processed in the same manner as requests from other individuals or workers.

In the course of the on-going discussion on the redefinition of the relationship between the State and the Catholic Church, a new agreement with the Catholic Church has been created for religious education in schools. According to this agreement, pupils at secondary schools may choose between traditional confessional religious education (provided for by the Catholic or the Protestant Church) or non-confessional classes on "Ethics and Culture." In the past, confessional religious classes were compulsory unless parents explicitly requested that the school board exempt their child from religious classes. Under the new agreement, parents automatically have a choice. In February the Government briefed parents of the pupils concerned about the changes and requested that they return a form to the school board to express their preference for the religious education for their children. Denominations other than the Catholic and the Protestant Church are free to regulate their own religious education.

The Government collaborates with religious institutions by supporting interfaith dialogs 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.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are amicable relations between the religious communities. Catholics, Protestants, and members of other faiths work well together on an ecumenical basis. Differences among religious faiths are not a significant source of tension in society.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

LITHUANIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion except in cases where religious activities contradict the Constitution and the law, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, some religious groups enjoy government benefits not available to others. Nontraditional religious groups face some restrictions.

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

The generally amicable relation among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, although members of religious minorities occasionally are subject to acts of intolerance. A certain level of anti-Semitic sentiment persists in the country.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of 25,174 square miles, and its population is approximately 3.5 million. The 2001 population census indicated that approximately 79 percent of the inhabitants consider themselves to be Roman Catholics; there were a reported 673 Catholic communities in 2000. The second largest religious group is the Orthodox Church (141,000 members and 43 communities), concentrated in the east, along the border with Belarus. The "Old Believers" number 27,000 and have 27 communities. An estimated 19,500 Lutherans (54 communities) are concentrated to the southwest. The Evangelical Reformed community has approximately 7,000 members in 12 communities. The 5 Sunni Muslim communities number approximately 2,700 members, while the Greek Catholic community has approximately 300 members. The Jewish community numbers approximately 4,000 (6 Jewish religious communities have 1,200 members). An estimated 9.4 percent of the population does not identify with any religious denomination.

Karaites, while not unique to the country, exist in few other locations in the world. They are considered by some to be a branch of Judaism; their religion is based exclusively on the Old Testament. Two houses of worship in Vilnius and Trakai serve the Karaite religious community of approximately 250 members. The Karaites have been in the country since 1397. Considered as well to constitute a distinct ethnic group, Karaites speak a Turkic-based language and use the Hebrew alphabet. Their community president also is their only religious leader.

The Chabad Lubavich, a Hassidic Jewish group, operates a school (kindergarten through 12th grade), a social center, and a kosher kitchen in the capital of Vilnius.

Approximately 0.23 percent of the population belong to what the Government refers to as "nontraditional" religious communities. The most numerous are the Full Gospel Word of Faith Movement, Pentecostals/Charismatics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and New Apostolic Church. According to the Ministry of Justice, a total of 991 traditional and 160 nontraditional religious associations and communities are registered. The number of religious nontraditional associations decreased following the consolidation of one religious association and the Ministry of Justice's cancellation of the registration of some associations that "have not shown signs of activity during the past 8 years."

Foreign missionary groups, including Baptists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and members of Jehovah's Witnesses, also are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution provides that a person's freedom to profess and propagate his or her religion or faith "may be subject only to those limitations prescribed by law and only when such restrictions are necessary to protect the safety of society, public order, a person's health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others." The religious teachings of churches and other religious organizations, their religious activities, and their houses of prayer may not be used for purposes that contradict the Constitution and the law. The freedom of expression of religious conviction also may be restricted temporarily during a period of martial law or a state of emergency. None of the limitations specified in the Constitution has been invoked. There is no state religion. However, under the 1995 Law on Religious Com-

munities and Associations, some religious groups enjoy government benefits not available to others.

The Constitution divides religious communities into state-recognized traditional groups and others. However, in practice a four-tier system exists: traditional, state-recognized, registered, and unregistered communities. Traditional religious communities and associations are not required to register their bylaws with the Ministry of Justice in order to receive legal status. However, nontraditional religious communities must present an application, a founding statement signed by no less than 15 members who are adult citizens of the country, and a description of their religious teachings and their aims. The Ministry must review the documents within 6 months.

The law stipulates that nontraditional religious communities may be granted state recognition if they are “backed by society” and have been registered in the country for at least 25 years. Both traditional and state-recognized communities can receive state subsidies; however, only the traditional ones receive the subsidy regularly. The law grants property rights for prayer houses, homes, and other buildings to religious communities, associations, and centers, and permits construction that is necessary for their activities. These traditional associations and communities receive annual financial support from the Government. Other religious communities are not eligible for regular financial assistance from the Government; however, they may receive government support for their cultural and social projects.

The law specifies nine religious communities that have been declared “traditional” and therefore are eligible for governmental assistance: Latin Rite Catholics, Greek Rite Catholics, Evangelical Lutherans, Evangelical Reformed Church members, Orthodox Christians (Moscow Patriarchate), Old Believers, Jews, Sunni Muslims, and Karaites. They do not have to pay social and health insurance for clergy and other employees; they can register marriages; and they are not subject to a value-added tax (VAT) on such services as electricity, telephone, and heat. However, only traditional communities have the right to teach religion in state schools and buy land to build churches (other communities may rent it). Only their clergy and theological students are exempt from military service, and only their top religious leaders are eligible for diplomatic passports. They also may have military chaplains. In addition, they have the right to establish subsidiary institutions.

Religious communities registered by the Ministry of Justice constitute the third status group; they do not receive regular subsidies, tax exemptions, social benefits, or military exemptions enjoyed by traditional and state recognized communities but can act as legal entities and thus rent land for religious buildings.

Unregistered communities have no juridical status or state privileges, but there were no reports that any such groups were prevented from worshipping or seeking members. The United Methodist Church of Lithuania’s recognition has been delayed. Legally the status of “state recognized” religious community is higher than that of a “registered” community but lower than that of a “traditional” community.

There is no separate government agency addressing religious groups; a small department in the Ministry of Justice handles requests of religious groups for registration. In November 2001, the Government reestablished the position of advisor for religious affairs, which it had abolished in March 2001, and appointed a person designated by the Catholic Church. The decision to abolish the position had contributed to a more evenhanded approach to religious matters; however, some observers believe that its reestablishment may benefit the Catholic Church more than other religions.

In 2000 the Constitutional Court confirmed the principle of separation between church and state in the sphere of education, by ruling that in state educational institutions, classes or groups may not be coestablished with state-recognized traditional religious associations. The Court also ruled that if either public or private educational establishments are sponsored jointly by a state institution and a religious group, the group may not set any religious test for employment of staff not connected with religious instruction. Finally, the Court ruled that the heads of state educational establishments could not be appointed and dismissed by government institutions on the recommendation of a religious association. The Catholic Church criticized the Court’s ruling.

In 2000 the Government and the Holy See agreed to establish a military Ordinariat to provide religious support to Catholic members of the military service in the form of military chaplains. In August 2002, the Ministry of Defense and the Catholic Church signed a regulation on military chaplains’ activities; there were 15 chaplains at the time the regulation was signed. The Ministry of Defense provides material support for the Ordinariat and its places of worship. Other traditional churches and religious groups also can provide religious support to the military services. Alternative military service within military structures is available, but

there is no option for alternative nonmilitary service, as requested by members of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In August 2000, three agreements between the Government and the Holy See took effect: "On Cooperation in the Sphere of Education and Culture," "On Spiritual Guidance of Catholics Serving in the Military," and "On Legal Aspects of Relations Between the Catholic Church and the State." The last of these agreements established Assumption Day (August 15) as a national holiday, in addition to the previously established holidays of St. Mary's celebration (January 1), Easter Monday, All Saint's Day (November 1), Christmas, and Boxing Day (December 26). The list of holidays can be changed by agreement of both sides. There were no reports of formal complaints that these agreements adversely affect religious freedom for the adherents of other religions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Local observers criticized draft amendments to the Law on Religious Communities and Associations, initiated by the Catholic Church. In the fall of 2002, the Government accepted the amendments and forwarded them to Parliament for approval. If approved by Parliament, the amendments would bring the law into conformity with the new Civil Code. However, the Government's advisor for religious affairs said in a public interview that the amendments will "help defend against the entrenchment of destructive sects." The amendments would further divide religious groups into the four-tier system. They contain a clause that only traditional religions may conduct religious instruction in state schools, and that only their religious ceremonies may be held there. The draft amendments also introduce a more cumbersome procedure for recognizing religious communities. Nontraditional religious communities will not be registered unless the Ministry of Justice says that their teaching is in line with human rights, freedom, and public order. If adopted, the law would also require a religious association seeking the status of "state recognized" religion to unite at least 0.1 percent of adults, effectively limiting such recognition to Jehovah's Witnesses only. However, the law would disqualify the United Methodist Church of Lithuania. The expected granting of the status of "state recognized" community to the Methodists has been delayed by Parliament in an apparent attempt to block such a decision with the new amendments. Legally, the status of "state recognized" religious community is higher than that of a "registered" community, but lower than that of a "traditional" community.

Nontraditional religious communities must submit an application and supporting documents to the Ministry of Justice to receive legal status. Since 1995 the Ministry of Justice has turned down two applications, those of the Osho Ojas Meditation Center and the Lithuanian Pagans Community (Old Sorcerer). The small Old Sorcerer community never tried to register as an NGO and ceased to exist in July 2002. Also in 2002, following objections by the Catholic Church, Parliament suspended the granting of status of a traditional community to another pagan group, the Old Baltic Faith Community Romuva. Romuva was registered as a religious community in 1992, consisting of some 1,500 persons.

The operations of foreign missionary groups within the country are not restricted. Most of the problems related to procedures for residency permits for religious workers (enacted by law in 1999) had been resolved by mid-2001. However, the Government appears to be continuing preferential treatment in this area for the nine traditional religions.

According to the Constitution, state and local teaching and education establishments are secular. However, in February the Vice Minister of Education admitted in a public interview that, due to an agreement with the Holy See, Catholic priests have the final say in hiring teachers for religious instruction in state schools. The law provides that only religious instruction of traditional and other state-recognized religious communities may be taught in state educational institutions. At the request of parents from these communities, schools can offer classes in religious instruction. In practice parents can choose classes in religious instruction or classes in ethics for non-religious education. The Government is obliged by law to finance religious instruction (of traditional confessions only) in state schools, and to fund fully schools of traditional religious groups and schools co-founded with traditional religious groups. In addition, the Government may, and often does, support schools run by nontraditional religious groups, who have the right to establish private schools and receive partial state funding.

Since September 2001, amendments to the Law on Religious Communities and Associations grant full government funding only to the educational institutions of traditional religious organizations. The governmental Department of European Law had criticized the amendments for discriminating against traditional religious communities and associations. The Department implied that although the Government

has the right to provide different legal statuses for different religious communities, differences in status should not result in differences in rights and privileges. A different law permits the Ministry of Education to give vouchers for pupils in private schools established by non-traditional religious communities.

The law grants all religious communities equal opportunity in regaining control over former property used for conducting religious services. However, the Catholic community has been more successful in regaining its property than many other religious communities. Some religious property, including 26 synagogues, was returned to the Jewish community, mostly from 1993 to 1996. The deadline for filing claims from Soviet times (July 1940) passed in 1996. A number of claims successfully were resolved, and others still were pending. Lack of funds for compensation and protracted bureaucratic obstacles are the primary problems preventing the return of private property. The Government has taken no action on the problem of restoring property of religious institutions that no longer exist and has no plans to do so.

In early 2002, the Government established a commission on communal property restitution to identify communal property eligible for restitution and propose amendments to the law on restituting property to religious communities so that the Jewish secular community (the majority of Jewish citizens) can benefit from the restitution process. The Government and city of Vilnius also established a procedure for rebuilding parts of the Jewish quarter in Vilnius Old Town. The project was expected to use private funds and give the Jewish community parts of the reconstructed buildings.

In spring 2002, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of an appeal by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the April 2001 Vilnius First District Court decision's that the Vilnius City Council had violated the previous owners' and tenants' rights when it returned four buildings to the Church in 1992 and 1993. The Church had appealed, asserting that it had owned the properties before they were nationalized in 1945 and that restitution had been carried out according to the law. According to the ruling, the Church may regain ownership of, or compensation for, the four buildings in Vilnius Old Town. In February the Supreme Court again ruled in favor of the Church in a related lawsuit, and the Church regained ownership of the buildings.

The Government's commission to coordinate the activities of governmental institutions in order to investigate whether the activities of religious, esoteric, or spiritual groups comply with the law includes representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Education, Health, and Foreign Affairs, the General Prosecutor's office, and the State Security Department. The Minister of Justice appoints the chairman of the commission. The commission was established in 2000 following some parliamentarians' calls for increased control of "sects," following negative coverage of some religious groups in the media. The commission takes as its guidance domestic laws and the recommendations (No. 1412 and No. 1178) of the Council of Europe, which seek to ensure that activities of religious groups are in line with the principles of a democratic society, human rights, and fundamental freedoms. The commission had taken no action and made no statements affecting specific religious groups by the end of the period covered by this report.

In December 2001, Stanislovas Buskevicius, a nationalist Member of Parliament, proposed draft legislation entitled "On Barring the Activities of Sects." After the draft was discussed widely, in September 2002, Parliament de facto rejected the bill by sending the bill back requesting "improvements" to the draft.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Justice registered 12 nontraditional religious groups and granted 8 traditional religious communities legal person status.

In January 2003, the Ministry of Education began distributing vouchers for school programs to students who attended a private school of the Word of Faith Church, a Protestant Church. In February 2002, following a lawsuit Vilnius County reregistered the school.

The Government has made an effort to support post-World War II restitution efforts during the period covered by this report. Following negotiations with an ad hoc committee of Lithuanian, American, and Israeli representatives of Jewish organizations, headed by Rabbi Andrew Baker, in January 2002, the Government turned over 309 Torahs to an Israeli spiritual and heritage group for distribution among

Jewish congregations worldwide. In April the Government decided to return 46 more Torah scrolls. The return of a few remaining Torahs at the National Museum has not been actively discussed.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relation among religions in society contributed to religious freedom, although members of religious minorities occasionally are subjected to acts of intolerance, such as insults.

An estimated 10 percent of the population before World War II were Jewish. More than 200,000 Jews (approximately 95 percent of that population) were killed in the Holocaust. The country still is reconciling itself with its past and working to understand it better. In 1998 President Valdas Adamkus established a historical commission to investigate both the crimes of the Holocaust and the subsequent Soviet occupation. The Commission has held annual conferences and several seminars and published several reports.

In the past several years, the country's Jewish communities have expressed concern over an increase in anti-Semitic remarks made by extremist and a few, more mainstream, politicians. The political leadership of the country and the national press generally criticize anti-Semitic statements when they occur.

On April 9, 2002, Holocaust Commemoration Day, in the Seimas (Parliament), the Lithuanian Freedom Party (LFP) issued a statement that described the Government's efforts to restore communal property to the Jewish community as "kow-towing to the Jews" and stated that it would turn its labor force into "slaves of the Jews." It also demanded that the Government end relations with Israel. The Seimas chairman, who is the leader of the New Union Party, criticized the statement; however, the Deputy Chairman of the Christian Democratic Party (CDP) warned the Government against making special arrangements to return Jewish communal property.

The Seimas commemorated Holocaust Day by publicly acknowledging and apologizing for the murder of Jews and destruction of Jewish culture in the country during World War II. Simonas Alperavicius, Chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, attributed recent public expressions of anti-Semitism to ignorance and the failure of society to recognize the extent of the destruction that occurred there. On April 11, 2002, the Vilnius basketball arena apologized for anti-Semitic chants by its fans during a game between a local team and an Israeli team.

In January Education and Culture Advisor Arvydas Juozaitis resigned shortly after criticizing Culture Minister Roma Dovydienene for "giving too much attention" to Jewish heritage in the Government's program for a Frankfurt Book fair.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains a close and regular dialog on religious issues with senior officials in the Government, Members of Parliament, and presidential advisors, as well as continual contact with religious leaders. Religious groups use the Embassy as a vehicle to voice their complaints, and the Embassy encourages religious leaders to keep the Embassy informed of their views on the status of religious freedom and any complaints. The Embassy has been active in discussing the restitution of Jewish communal property with government officials and community leaders in the country. The Embassy also maintains regular contact with U.S. missionary groups.

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy's democracy commission funded a number of projects with the goal of promoting greater religious tolerance, particularly those related to building broader understanding of the Holocaust.

LUXEMBOURG

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 998.5 square miles, and its population is approximately 439,500. The country is historically Roman Catholic, and Catholicism remains the predominant faith. According to a 1979 law, the Government may not collect or maintain statistics on religious affiliation; but over 90 percent of the population is estimated to be baptized Catholic. The Lutheran and Calvinist Churches are the largest Protestant denominations. Muslims are estimated to number approximately 6,000 persons, including 1,500 refugees from Montenegro; Orthodox (Greek, Serbian, Russian, and Romanian) adherents are estimated to number approximately 5,000 persons; and there are approximately 1,000 Jews. The Baha'i Faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Universal Church, and members of Jehovah's Witnesses are represented in smaller numbers. The number of professed atheists reportedly is growing.

There are no significant foreign missionary groups. Many religious groups described as "sects" are represented in the country. They are expected to obey the law, but their activities have not become significant political or social issues.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion. The Government does not register religions or religious groups. However, based on the Concordat of 1801, some churches receive financial support from the State. The Constitution specifically provides for state payment of the salaries of clergy. Pursuant to negotiated agreements with the Government, the following religious groups receive such support: Roman Catholic, Greek and Russian Orthodox, Jewish, and some Protestant denominations. In January the Government signed a convention to extend this support to the Anglican Church; the legislation needed to finalize this convention was pending by the end of this reporting period. An application for financial support for the Muslim community has been under consideration for over 5 years. The Muslim community's agreement to name a national representative and single interlocutor is expected to allow the discussions to move forward.

There is a long tradition of religious education in public schools. A 1997 convention between the Minister of National Education and the Roman Catholic Archbishop governs religious instruction. In accordance with this convention, religious instruction is a local matter, coordinated at the communal level between representatives of the Catholic Church and communal authorities. Government-paid lay teachers provide instruction (totaling 2 school hours per week) at the primary school level. Parents and pupils may choose between instruction in Roman Catholicism or an ethics course; requests for exemption from religious instruction are addressed on an individual basis. Although approximately 85 percent of primary school students choose religious instruction, the number drops to 65 percent for high school students. The Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist Churches have an agreement for the provision of instruction in the Protestant religions within the overall framework of religious instruction in the school system. There are oral agreements between Catholics and Protestants at the local level to provide religious instruction to Protestant students, as required, during school hours. Protestant instruction is available on demand, and provision of instruction in other faiths may be offered in response to demand.

The State subsidizes private religious schools. All private, religious, and non-sectarian schools are eligible for and receive government subsidies. The State also subsidizes a Catholic seminary.

The following religious holidays are considered national holidays: Shrove Monday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday, Assumption Day, All Saints Day, All Souls Day, Christmas Day, and the second day of Christmas.

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 ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths work well together on an interfaith basis. Differences among religious faiths are not a significant source of tension in society.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

MACEDONIA (THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF)

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

There was improvement in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The August 13 Framework Agreement, concluded in 2001 to end Macedonia's ethnic Albanian insurgency, contained broad constitutional and legislative reforms focused on greater minority rights. At the beginning of the implementation of this agreement and during the 2002 election campaign, religious issues increasingly were politicized. Following the October 31, 2002, formation of the Government, its representatives mitigated ethnic and religious tensions. In numerous public settings, officials reduced the level of rhetoric and consistently promoted reconciliation. The absence of provocative actions and public statements by government officials, which characterized the previous government, has improved respect for religious freedom. Additionally, there were no attacks on any churches or mosques during the period covered by this report. The law places some limits on religious practice by restricting the establishment of places of worship and restricting where contributions may be made.

The generally amicable relationship among the various religious communities contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 9,781 square miles, and its population is approximately 2 million. The country has two major religions: Orthodox Christianity and Islam. Nominally, approximately 66 percent of the population are Macedonian Orthodox, approximately 30 percent are Muslim, approximately 1 percent are Roman Catholic, and approximately 3 percent are of other faiths (largely various Protestant denominations). There is also a small Jewish community in Skopje. Religious participation tends to focus on major holidays or life cycle events.

Numerous foreign missionaries are active and represent a wide range of faiths. Many of these missionaries enter the country in connection with other work, often charitable or medical. Several Protestant missionary groups and members of Jehovah's Witnesses are active.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. However, the law places some limits on religious practices, including the establishment of places of worship and the collection of contributions. As part of the August 2001 Framework Agreement, which ended Macedonia's ethnic Albanian insurgency, the Constitution was amended to include mention of the Jewish community and the Methodist Church. None of these communities has official status or privileges.

The constitutional provision for religious freedom is refined further in the 1997 Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups. This law designates the Macedonian Orthodox Church, the Islamic community, the Roman Catholic Church, the

Jewish community, and the Methodist Church as religious communities, and all other religions as religious groups. However, there is no legal differentiation between religious communities and groups. In 1999 the Constitutional Court struck down several provisions of the 1997 law, and in practice the remaining provisions are not enforced consistently.

The Government requires that religious groups be registered. The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups contained a number of specific requirements for the registration of religious groups that were struck down by the Constitutional Court in 1999. Consequently, there was considerable confusion over which procedures still applied, and several foreign religious bodies experienced delays in their efforts to register. This law tends to favor traditional denominations, registered as communities. Other denominations registered as religious "groups" and had to undergo stricter scrutiny by the Republic Commission for Relations with the Religious Communities, compared to traditional religious communities or organizations. During the period covered by this report, the process remained slow and cumbersome. In practice religious groups need to register to obtain permits to build churches, and to request visas for foreigners and other permits from the Government. During 2002 religious groups were granted legal registration and there were no reports that any groups were denied registration. For example, Campus Crusade for Christ applied and was granted registration by the Commission, with its workers receiving religious visas.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups also requires that foreigners carrying out religious work and religious rites be registered with the Government's Commission on Relations with the Religious Communities. The Government does not restrict or actively monitor new groups or advise the public on them. The Government no longer keeps a count of registered religious groups and communities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups places some restrictions on the establishment of places of worship and parochial schools. It provides that religious rites and religious activities "shall take place at churches, mosques, and other temples, and in gardens that are parts of those facilities, at cemeteries, and at other facilities of the religious group." Provision is made for holding services in other places, provided that a permit is obtained at least 15 days in advance. No permit or permission is required to perform religious rites in a private home. The law also states that religious activities "shall not violate the public peace and order, and shall not disrespect the religious feelings and other freedoms and rights" of persons who are not members of that particular religion. The Government does not enforce actively most of these provisions of the law but acts upon complaints when they are received.

Several registered Protestant groups have been unable to obtain building permits for new church facilities due to bureaucratic complications that affect all new construction. Churches and mosques often are built without the appropriate building permits. The Government has not taken any actions against religious buildings that lack proper construction permits.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups also places some limitations on the collection of contributions by restricting them only to places where religious rites and activities are conducted; however, in practice these provisions of the law are not enforced.

During the period covered by this report, the Government elected in September 2002 moved away from the previous Government's policy of politicizing religious issues. The new Government has encouraged inter-ethnic and by extension, inter-religious reconciliation. During and after its election campaign and following, the Government has on numerous occasions called for ethnic and religious tolerance; such statements have been broadcast on television news and in print media. In May Prime Minister Crvenkovski, together with representatives from various religious communities, addressed a conference on tolerance organized by the Holocaust Fund of Macedonia. The absence of provocative actions and rhetoric, which characterized the previous government, has been a significant factor in the improvement for respect for religious freedom.

Children below the age of 10 years may not receive religious instruction without the permission of their parents or guardians. A new law provides for religious education in the schools on a voluntary basis. The Government continues to develop the implementation guidelines.

The law specifies that primary school children must be taught in the Macedonian language, and may not be taught by foreigners, even if the children themselves are foreigners and do not speak Macedonian. Foreigners also are not permitted to oper-

ate educational institutions, manage classrooms, or give grades to non-citizens. In September 2002, authorities moved to shut down the Timothy Academy, an evangelical Christian academy operated by foreigners for foreign children. In December 2002, the new Government granted work visas to the school's employees and in June the Academy was granted registration as a nongovernmental organization.

The Law on Religious Communities and Religious Groups specifically allows for foreign citizens to carry out religious activities, but only at the request of a registered religious body. Because many evangelical Christian missionaries wish to conduct religious activities that are aimed at the creation of new groups of believers, rather than at operating through existing churches, some foreign missionaries have chosen to disregard this portion of the law. This approach on occasion has led to difficulties for those missionaries, as the authorities have questioned their actual reasons for entering the country, usually on tourist visas. The Baptist Church registered in country continues to refuse to sponsor Baptist missionaries from churches based in other countries. During the period covered by this report, several missionaries were able to obtain religious worker or other worker visas.

The issue of restitution of religious properties expropriated by the former Yugoslav Government has still not been resolved fully. Some progress was made in restitution of previously state-owned religious property. Many churches and mosques had extensive grounds or other properties that were expropriated by the Communist regime. Virtually all churches and mosques have been returned to the ownership of the appropriate religious community, but that is not the case for many of the other properties. Often restitution or compensation claims are complicated by the fact that the seized properties have changed hands many times or have been developed. In view of the country's very limited financial resources, it is unlikely that religious communities will gain restitution of many of the expropriated properties. Nevertheless, on August 28, 2002, the Ministry of Finance and the Jewish Community reached a satisfactory settlement on the restitution of Jewish communal property after more than 6 years of talks. The Ministry of Finance agreed to return to the Jewish Community three buildings in Bitola, one piece of real estate in Skopje, and bonds valued at approximately \$2.76 million (165 million denars).

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no reports of destruction of places of worship during the period covered by this report. However, many places were not fully intact as a result of the 2001 conflict. On August 15, a Sunni Muslim group illegally established an ongoing, armed presence in a Bektashi religious facility—the Arabati Baba Tekke in Tetovo—home to a small, active Bektashi Islamic community, and asserted a claim to ownership of the facility, a hotel, and two restaurants on the property's grounds. The occupying group may have received the tacit support of the then-governing political parties VMRO-DPMNE and DPA; the owner of the restaurants and hotel were reputed to be an opposition supporter. At the end of the period covered by this report, the ongoing ownership dispute between the Bektashi religious sect and the Islamic Community over the Bektashi religious facility remained unresolved. Although armed interlopers had left by year's end under international community pressure, fundamentalist Islamic leaders still held services on the Tekke grounds five times per day.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 tolerant relationship among the various religious communities continued to contribute to religious freedom although it has been tested as a result of inter-ethnic tensions. In November 2002, a U.S. Institute of Peace-sponsored group of visiting U.S. religious scholars met with representatives of the religious communities to discuss the formation of an Inter-religious Council.

In May the Holocaust Fund sponsored an international conference focused on the importance of religious tolerance. Representatives of some religious communities as well as the Prime Minister attended the conference and addressed the gathering.

The religious communities in the country often reflect an ethnic identity. Specifically, most Muslims are ethnic Albanians. However, there are a number of ethnic Macedonians who are Muslim. Ethnic Macedonians contend that they often are associated with the policies of ethnic Albanian Muslims, which they do not support.

Societal discrimination is more likely to be based upon ethnic bias than upon religious prejudice.

During the period covered by this report, there was a dramatic decrease in vandalism of religious properties, and there were no reports of destruction of places of worship. In December 2002, two Orthodox churches in the villages of Setole and Otunja, which had already been looted in 2001, were vandalized.

No further progress has been made in investigating 2001 attacks on Muslim places of worship, including the June 2001 attack on the Bitola mosque and the August 2001 burning of the Prilep Mosque.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and Embassy staff met with leaders and representatives of the various religious communities, as well as with government officials, to address religious freedom issues and support the new Government's policy of ethnic and religious tolerance.

MALTA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion.

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country, which consists of 3 islands in the Mediterranean Sea, has a total area of 122 square miles, and its population is approximately 397,296. The overwhelming majority of citizens (approximately 95 percent) are Roman Catholic, and approximately 63 percent attend services regularly. While some political leaders diverge from Catholicism, most of the country's political leaders also are Roman Catholic.

Most congregants at the local Protestant churches are not Maltese; many British retirees live in the country, and vacationers from many other nations compose the remainder of such congregations. There are approximately 500 Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Bible Baptist Church and the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches have about 60 affiliates. There is one Muslim mosque and one Jewish congregation. Zen Buddhism and the Baha'i Faith also have about 40 members. There is one Muslim mosque and a Muslim primary school. Of the estimated 3,000 Muslims in Malta, approximately 2,250 are foreigners, approximately 600 are naturalized citizens, and approximately 150 are native-born Maltese.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion, and declares that the authorities of the Catholic Church have "the authority to teach which principles are right and which are wrong." The Government and the Catholic Church participate in a foundation that finances Catholic schools, where tuition is free. The foundation was established in 1991 as a result of the transfer of non-pastoral land to the State under the 1991 Ecclesiastical Entities Act. The Government subsidizes children living in Church-sponsored residential homes. There is one Muslim private school, and work is expected to begin soon on a 500-grave Muslim cemetery. Some governmental policies, such as a ban on divorce, reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Since 1991 churches of all kinds (not just the Roman Catholic Church) have had similar legal rights: Religious organizations can own property such as buildings, and their ministers can perform marriages and other functions.

While religious instruction in Catholicism is compulsory in all state schools, the Constitution establishes the right not to receive this instruction if the student (or guardian, in the case of a minor) objects.

There are four religious holidays that are considered to be national holidays: The Motherhood of Our Lady (January 1), St. Paul's Shipwreck (February 10), the Assumption (August 15), and Christmas Day (December 25). These holidays do not impact negatively any religious groups.

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 ATTITUDES

The Roman Catholic Church makes its presence and its influence felt in everyday life. However, converts from Catholicism do not face legal or societal discrimination, and relations between the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations generally are characterized by respect and cooperation.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Whenever possible, the Embassy advocates continued observance of basic human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Both the Embassy's private discussions with government officials and its informational programs for the public consistently emphasize these points. Through a variety of public affairs programs, the Embassy continues to work with different sectors of society, including religious groups, to promote inter-faith dialog and tolerance.

MOLDOVA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the law includes restrictions that at times inhibit the activities of some religious groups.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. After 10 years of refusals, the Government registered the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia (the Bessarabian Orthodox Church), but the Government continued to uphold its earlier decisions to deny some groups registration. There is no state religion; however, the Moldovan Orthodox Church receives some special treatment from the Government. A number of minority religious groups in the separatist region of Transnistria continued to be denied registration and are subjected to official harassment.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, disputes among various branches of the Christian Orthodox faith continued, and there was one reported instance of the desecration of a Jewish cemetery. There were no major cases of harassment reported.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has an area of approximately 13,000 square miles, and its official population, according to a census from the Soviet era, is approximately 4.5 million (unofficial estimates of the number of citizens working abroad range from 500,000 to 1 million). The predominant religion is Christian Orthodox. More than 90 percent of the population nominally belong to one of two Orthodox denominations. The

Moldovan Orthodox Church, according to the State Service on Religious Issues, has 1,080 parishes; the Bessarabian Orthodox Church has 84 parishes. In addition, followers of the Old Rite Russian Orthodox Church (Old Believers) make up approximately 3.6 percent of the population. The religious traditions of the Orthodox Church are entwined with the culture and patrimony of the country. Many self-professed atheists routinely celebrate religious holidays, cross themselves, and even light candles and kiss icons if local tradition and the occasion demand. Other faiths include Roman Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baha'is, Jews, followers of Reverend Moon, Molocans (a Russian group), Messianic Jews (who believe that Jesus was the Messiah), Lutherans, Presbyterians, Hare Krishnas, and some other charismatic Christian and evangelical Christian groups. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) has 2 congregations, with approximately 220 members.

According to the most recently available numbers, the Jewish community has approximately 31,300 members, including approximately 20,000 living in Chisinau; 3,100 in Balti and surrounding areas; 2,200 in Tiraspol; 2,000 in Benderi; and 4,000 in small towns.

Foreign missionaries represent many faiths and denominations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the 1992 Law on Religions, which codifies religious freedoms, contains restrictions that have inhibited the activities of unregistered religious groups. Although the law was amended in July 2002, many of the restrictions are still in place. The law provides for freedom of religious practice, including each person's right to profess his religion in any form. It also protects the confidentiality of the confessional, allows denominations to establish associations and foundations, and states that the Government may not interfere in the religious activities of denominations. The Law specifies that "in order to organize and function," religious organizations must be registered with the Government, and unregistered groups may not own property, engage employees, or obtain space in public cemeteries in their own names. There is no state religion; however, the Moldovan Orthodox Church receives some favored treatment from the Government. The Metropolitan of Chisinau and All Moldova has a diplomatic passport. Other high-ranking Orthodox Church officials also reportedly have diplomatic passports issued by the Government.

The procedures for registering a religious organization are the same for all groups. On July 12, 2002, Parliament, intending to simplify the registration process, adopted amendments to the Law on Religions. For an organization to register, it must present to the State Service on Religious Issues a declaration of creation, by-laws, and an explanation of its basic religious beliefs. The State Service on Religious Issues enters—within 30 working days—the religious organization into the Register of Religions. Under the new procedures, at the request of the State Service on Religious Issues, a court can annul the recognition of the religious organization if the organization "carries out activities that harm the independence, sovereignty, integrity, and security of the Republic of Moldova, the public order, or are connected with political activities." The amendments also provide that religious organizations are prohibited from including in their by-laws any provisions that would violate the Constitution or any other laws.

Although the amendments to the Law on Religions were intended to simplify the registration process and make the process essentially automatic, the State Service on Religious Issues continues to deny the registration of some groups, such as the Spiritual Organization of Muslims. The Muslims' application was denied because the State Service claimed their documents were not in order.

The Government has recognized 21 religious organizations; however, a number of organizations have been denied registration or encountered difficulties in connection with their registration applications. In 1999, amendments to the Law on Religions legalizing proselytizing went into effect. However, the law explicitly forbids "abusive proselytizing," which is defined as an attempt to influence an individual's religious faith through violence or abuse of authority. During the period covered by this report, the authorities did not take any legal action against any individual for proselytizing.

In December 2002, a new draft Law on Religions, which contained numerous contentious provisions, was circulated. The draft law has since been revised, and it appears that many of the restrictive articles have been deleted. Parliament has taken no action on the draft law.

On February 21, a new Law on Combating Extremism was passed by Parliament and went into effect on March 28. Critics of the law raised concerns that the law could be used to abuse opposition organizations—including religious organizations—and individuals. By the end of the period covered by this report, this law had not been used against religious organizations.

A new Criminal Code, adopted by Parliament on April 18, 2002 and in effect since June 12, includes an article on religion. The article provides punishment for “preaching religious beliefs or fulfillment of religious rituals, which cause harm to the health of citizens, or other harm to their persons or rights, or instigate citizens not to participate in public life or of the fulfillment of their obligations as citizens.” Drafters allegedly copied the passage almost word-for-word from the previous code, which was passed in 1961 when the country was part of the Soviet Union. No organization was prosecuted under this new code during the period covered in this report.

Foreign missionaries are permitted to enter the country. They experience the same difficulties in obtaining residence permits and customs clearances as other foreign workers.

In 2000 Parliament amended the Law on Education to make “moral and spiritual” instruction mandatory for primary school students and optional for secondary and university students. According to the Ministry of Education, “moral and spiritual” education was initiated 3 years ago, but only on an experimental basis. The program was introduced gradually, beginning in 2001, for first graders, and then in 2002 and 2003 for second and third graders, respectively. In some schools, there is a class specifically on religion, although this subject is conditioned on a request and approval by the parents, and whether the school has enough funds to cover the cost of the course.

Two public schools and a kindergarten are open only to Jewish students, and a kindergarten in Chisinau has a special “Jewish group.” These schools receive the same funding as the other state schools and are supplemented by financial support from the community. However, Jewish students are not restricted to these schools. There are no comparable schools for other religious faiths and no reports of such schools for other religious faiths. Agudath Israel operates a private boys’ yeshiva and a girls’ yeshiva, both licensed by the Ministry of Education. The total enrollment of both schools is fewer than 100 students. Total enrollment for all Jewish related schools, including those operated by Agudath Israel and public schools, is approximately 300. There are a number of theological institutes, seminaries, and other places of religious education throughout the country.

The authorities in Transnistria (a separatist region not under the control of the Government) also impose registration requirements that negatively affect religious groups and have denied registration to some groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Law on Religions contains restrictions that have inhibited the activities of unregistered religious groups, and the Government continued to deny registration to some religious groups. Before Article 15, which prohibited registration of “schismatic movements” of a particular religion, was deleted in July 2002, the Government used the article as the basis for its decision not to recognize two Orthodox Christian groups.

Unregistered religious organizations are not permitted to buy land or obtain construction permits for churches or seminaries. In some cases, members of unregistered religious groups hold services in homes, nongovernmental organization (NGO) offices, and other locations. In other cases, the groups obtain property and permits in the names of individual members. Individual churches or branches of officially registered religious organizations are not obliged to register with local authorities; however, the local branch must register locally if it wants to make legal transactions as a legal body, including the ability to receive donations in its name.

Following a strong recommendation by the Council of Europe, on July 30, 2002, the Government recognized the Bessarabian Orthodox Church in accordance with the new procedures provided by the Law on Religions, after years of denying it recognition.

The Bessarabian Orthodox Church was formed in 1992 when a number of priests broke away from the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate. The Bessarabian Orthodox Church, which regards itself as the legal and canonical successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church in Bessarabia (the territory bounded by the Nistru, Prut, and Danube Rivers and the Black Sea, of which most of present-day Moldova is a part), subordinated itself to the Bucharest Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Recognition of the Bessarabian Church could have implications for the church’s ongoing property dis-

putes with the Moldovan Orthodox Church, and the Government consistently has cited these issues, as well as its designation of the Bessarabian Church as a “schismatic movement,” in its denial of registration. In September 2001, the Government declared the Moldovan Orthodox Church the successor to the pre-World War II Romanian Orthodox Church for purposes of all property ownership, although no attempt has been made to seize those properties already in Bessarabian Church hands. The registration issue has political as well as religious overtones, since it raises the question of whether the Orthodox Church should be oriented toward the Moscow Patriarchate, or oriented toward the Bucharest Patriarchate.

On May 29, 2002, after a long series of registration denials and legal appeals, the Supreme Court of Justice ruled that the Government must register the Church of the True Orthodox-Moldova, a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, based in the United States. Nevertheless, despite the stipulation that final court decisions should be implemented within 30 days, the State Service on Religious Issues failed to act and did not register the church. In November 2002, the True Orthodox Church filed a case with the European Court for Human Rights against the Government for failure to implement the court decision. The court executor, on behalf of the church, has asked the court to fine the State Service on Religious Issues. The Service asked the court for a 2-week extension to register the church, but after 3 weeks, instead of registering it, the Service filed an extraordinary appeal with the Court of Appeals. The Court reviewed the appeal and said that the Service was not allowed to file the appeal, since the case was made against the Government, not the Service. Within a couple of weeks another appeal from the Prime Minister was filed. Due to the restructuring of the court system, there has been a long delay in hearing the appeal. The appeal is expected to be sent to the Supreme Court by 2004. The Church had submitted applications for registration in 1997, 1998, and 2000; the Government rejected the applications on various grounds.

The Mormons have continuously faced bureaucratic obstacles and have not been successful in obtaining registration; they have indicated their intention to attempt to register now that the registration has been simplified. Since the registration process was simplified, the Mormons stated that they intend to apply for registration in the near future. During the period covered by this report, the Mormons did not report any resistance or pressure from state authorities.

On July 27, 2002, individuals from the Ministry of Interior detained and questioned for 3 hours the leader of the Spiritual Organization of Muslims in Moldova. The Muslim leader was told that he was detained on charges related to terrorism, although the Ministry of Interior never provided additional information or clarification on these initial charges. Before being released, he was interrogated regarding his connection with the NGO “Calauza,” a local Islamic organization that sponsors adult summer camps to study the Koran. On July 28, 2002, individuals from the Ministry of Interior detained and allegedly beat two members of Calauza. The members of Calauza were interrogated in a similar manner as the leader of the Muslims, and questioned about whether their organization or summer camps had ties to terrorist organizations. The Government had not registered the Church by the end of the period covered by this report.

The law provides for restitution to politically repressed or exiled persons of property that was confiscated during the successive Nazi and Soviet regimes. This regulation, in effect, has been extended to religious communities; however, the Moldovan Orthodox Church has been favored over other religious groups. The Church had little difficulty in recovering nearly all of its property and, in cases where property was destroyed, the Government offered alternative compensation. The Church has recovered churches, schools, hospitals, orphanages, and administrative properties. Property disputes among the Moldovan and Bessarabian Churches have not been resolved. The Jewish community has experienced mixed results in its effort to recover its property; however, during the period covered by this report, there were no pending restitution cases. The Baptist Church only has one remaining property-restitution claim, still pending at the end of the period covered in this report. In May 2001, the Molocans appealed to Parliament to hear their property restitution case, but the Parliament denied their request on the grounds that it was not within its jurisdiction. There was no movement on the Molocans’ case during the period covered by this report.

Authorities in Transnistria used registration requirements and other legal mechanisms to restrict the religious freedom of some religious groups. Evangelical religious groups meeting in private homes reportedly have been told that they do not have the correct permits to use their residences as venues for religious services. In the past they and other non-Orthodox groups generally were not allowed to rent property and often were harassed during religious services.

In 1997 the authorities in Transnistria announced that they would annul the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Jehovah's Witnesses in Transnistria were originally registered in 1991, and the church was reregistered by the Ministry of Justice in 1994 and 1997. However, in 1997 the President's Commissioner for Religions and Cults sent official letters to public authorities claiming that the activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses was banned and that their registration was annulled. These allegations were false. Using the President's Commissioner's false letter, authorities have repeatedly harassed the Jehovah's Witnesses, including halting the distribution of religious literature and refusing to approve a property request to build a house of worship. In November 2001, the Jehovah's Witnesses lodged an official complaint with the "President" of Transnistria, and in January 2002, lodged a complaint with the Magistrate in Tiraspol against the illegal actions of the President's Commissioner for Religions and Cults. The President's Commissioner eventually admitted his guilt in writing the false letters, and in June 2002, the Transnistrian Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Nevertheless, on June 20, 2002, the public prosecutor in Tiraspol lodged a case against the Jehovah's Witnesses, seeking to ban the religious activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses and to annul its registration. The liquidation trial began on July 11, 2002, and has since been postponed several times. The next hearing of this liquidation case is scheduled before the Supreme Court on September 9, 2003. On July 18, 2002, the President's Commissioner for Religions and Cults sent a letter to various government departments with instructions to consider the Jehovah's Witnesses as illegal until the case brought against them had been finalized. The Jehovah's Witnesses have lodged an official complaint and a counter lawsuit against the President's Commissioner for Religions and Cults. Following several hearings, the Court has decided to suspend the trial until the liquidation case has been finalized.

There have been no reported instances since January 2000 in which Transnistrian officials confiscated religious tracts from members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The Methodist Church was denied registration in late 2000 and has made no progress in its efforts to have its case reviewed. The Church of the Living God has been denied registration in five towns in Transnistria. The Church has not been in contact with international organizations since 2000, and some international observers believe it has ceased to exist. In March 2002, a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses was fined (approximately \$27) for door-to-door preaching, despite a general understanding that door-to-door preaching—unless it is viewed as abusive proselytizing—is not a violation of the law.

The Baptist community in Transnistria remains unregistered. In previous years, the Baptists in Transnistria complained of increased harassment from the authorities; however, during the period covered by this report the Baptists reported no direct harassment. In addition, authorities did not threaten to destroy the church, and the group continued to meet in the same building. In the February 2001 Moldovan parliamentary elections, a reported 80 percent of those persons from Transnistria who crossed the Dniester River to vote (voting was not allowed in Transnistria itself), voted for the independent candidate and Baptist minister, Valeriu Ghiletschi.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 religions in society contributes to religious freedom. The dispute between the Moldovan and Bessarabian Orthodox Churches is ongoing; however, the adherents of the respective Churches do not interfere with each others' freedom to worship.

In February 2003, eight tombstones were destroyed in a Jewish cemetery in Balti. However, according to a leading Rabbi in Chisinau, it is not clear whether this event was caused by anti-Jewish sentiment.

On December 16, 2002, the Transnistrian authorities found two individuals guilty of vandalism and sentenced them to 6 years in prison and to 3 years of a suspended sentence, respectively. The Transnistrian authorities have developed a new textbook that is to be used at all school levels, which reportedly contains negative and defamatory information regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses.

There were a few reports of negative press articles about non-Orthodox religions. The Jehovah's Witnesses have been the target of articles criticizing its beliefs and

legitimacy, and the Baptists in Transnistria claim press reports about their religion have been negative in the separatist region.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy officers have met with leaders and legal representatives of many religious organizations to discuss registration, restitution, and other problems the organizations have had with the authorities.

The U.S. Ambassador met with leaders of the major religious organizations at various times during the period covered by this report. Embassy employees maintain official or social contact with most of the resident American missionaries. The Embassy has supported the activities of religious and secular groups.

The Embassy's human rights officer maintains regular contact with religious leaders throughout the country, including in the separatist Transnistria region.

MONACO

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government denies religious organizations regarded as "sects" permission to operate.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The principality has a total area of 0.8 square miles, and its population is approximately 32,020. Roman Catholicism is the state religion, and most of the approximately 7,100 citizens living in the principality adhere to that religion, at least nominally. There are five Catholic churches in the principality and a cathedral presided over by an archbishop. Protestantism is the next most practiced religion, with two churches. There is one synagogue. The Constitution provides the nearly 25,000 noncitizens resident in the principality the same religious freedom as citizens. Most noncitizens also adhere to either Catholicism or Protestantism, although there are some residents who adhere to Judaism, Islam, or other world religions. There are no mosques in the principality. No missionaries operate in the principality.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions. Roman Catholicism is the state religion. Most citizens adhere to Roman Catholicism. The Catholic ritual generally plays an important role in state festivities, such as the annual national day celebration. The Constitution provides the nearly 25,000 noncitizens who live in the principality with the same religious freedom as the approximately 7,100 citizens.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

No missionaries operate in the principality and proselytizing is strongly discouraged. However, there is no law against proselytizing by religious organizations that are registered formally by the Ministry of State. Organizations regarded as religious "sects" routinely have been denied such registration in the past. There were no reports of religious organizations being denied registration during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. There are no known ecumenical movements or activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions. There were no reports of societal religious violence in the principality.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

THE NETHERLANDS

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

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Government continues to focus on better integration of Muslims into society following the national debate triggered by the killing in 2002 of a politician who highlighted the issue. However, there is rising intolerance towards Muslims due to the events of fall 2001, as well as rising crime in the country. There is also growing anti-Semitism, particularly among Muslims, due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 16,485 square miles, and its population is approximately 16.2 million. Approximately 32 percent of the population consider themselves Roman Catholic, 12 percent Dutch Reformed, 5 percent Muslim, 4 percent Calvinist Reformed, 3 percent non-Christian (Hindu, Jewish, or Buddhist), and 40 percent atheist or agnostic.

Society has become increasingly secular. According to the Government's Social Cultural Planning Bureau, religious membership has declined steadily from 76 percent in 1958 to 41 percent in 1995 and continues to decrease, although at a slower pace. Membership is decreasing among all denominations, except Islam.

Approximately 26 percent of religious practitioners are active within their religious communities. In 1999 an estimated 14 percent of Roman Catholics, 30 percent of Dutch Reformed, and 51 percent of Calvinist Reformed attended church at least once every 2 weeks.

Those who leave a religion rarely return. Nonetheless, significant numbers of those who have left their religions still consider themselves to be members of a religious group. Approximately 60 percent of citizens claim adherence to a religion. However, the beliefs and practices of many of these adherents have developed into what some describe as a selective approach to religion, accepting the positive but not the negative aspects of a particular religion. Approximately 20 percent of citizens, primarily among those who have left the "traditional" churches, describe themselves as "seekers of spiritual or philosophical truths." These persons tend to gravitate toward (although not necessarily to join) newer or non-orthodox religious movements, such as Pentecostal groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Scientology, Theosophy, or Anthroposophy.

In the wake of secularization since the 1960s, many Roman Catholics have left the Church. Among those remaining, many express alienation from their religious hierarchy and doctrine. For example, most of the country's Catholics express no objections to female or married priests and differ with church thinking on a number of sensitive doctrinal issues.

Dutch Protestantism is quite heterogeneous. Among the Protestant churches, the Dutch Reformed Church remains the largest, although it also has suffered the greatest losses to secularization. Church membership in this denomination has declined by two-thirds in the past 50 years. The second largest Protestant group, the Calvinist Reformed Church, has been less affected by membership losses and even has succeeded in attracting former members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Other Protestant denominations include Baptists, Lutherans, and Remonstrants.

The country has a long tradition of providing shelter to non-Christian religions. For example, the present Jewish community includes fewer than 25,000 active members but is thriving and operates its own schools.

The number of Muslims continues to rise steadily primarily due to Turkish and Moroccan immigrants marrying partners from their countries of origin. By year's end, there were approximately 279,000 Moroccans and 320,000 Turks in the country. Additional Muslims came from the former colony of Suriname. In the past decade, Muslim numbers further increased due to the large numbers of asylum seekers from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia. By year's end, the total number of Muslims amounted to about 890,000, or 5.5 percent of the population; the majority are Sunni. A network of mosques and cultural centers serves the Islamic community. This network is organized to conform to the country's system of subsidies, which underwrites cultural activities geared to social orientation and the promotion of equal opportunities. The number of mosques has increased to approximately 400; more than half cater to Turks, approximately 140 to Moroccans, and approximately 50 to Surinames. The founding of over 30 Islamic schools further reflects the increased influence of Islam.

There is a sizable community of approximately 95,000 Hindus, of whom 85 percent originally came from Suriname and about 10 percent from India. The country also hosts smaller numbers of Hindus from Uganda, as well as similar movements based on Hindu teachings as Ramakrishna, Hare Krishna, Sai Baba, and Osho. The Buddhist community is quite small, with approximately 17,000 members.

There were no reports of foreign missionary groups operating in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution permits the Government to place restrictions on the exercise of religion only on limited grounds, such as health hazards, traffic safety, and risk of public disorder.

The Calvinist Reformed Church enjoyed a privileged status until 1795. It received government subsidies, and only church members could hold public office. Religion and State have been separate since 1798. The Government provides state subsidies to religious organizations that maintain educational facilities. The Government provides funding to public as well as to religious schools, other religious educational institutions, and religious health care facilities, irrespective of their religious affiliation. In order to qualify for funding, institutions must meet strict nonreligious-based criteria for curriculum standards, minimum size, and health care.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, the law does recognize the existence of religious denominations and grants them certain rights and privileges, including tax exemptions. Although the law does not formally define what constitutes a "religious denomination" for these purposes, religious groups generally have not experienced any problems qualifying as a religious denomination.

The law provides for minority views to be heard on radio and television. For example, broadcasting time has been allotted to the Islamic Broadcasting Foundation, an alliance of all Muslim groups in the country.

The Government of Turkey exercises influence within the country's Turkish Islamic community through its religious affairs directorate, the Diyanet, which is permitted to appoint imams for the 140 Turkish mosques in the country. There is no such arrangement with the Moroccan Government. The Moroccan Government tries to exercise influence over the approximately 100 Moroccan mosques through a federation of Moroccan friendship societies. Authorities have not been pleased with Turkish and Moroccan interference with religious and political affairs because such interference appears to run counter to government efforts to encourage integration of Muslims into society. For example, government authorities insist on strict observance of mandatory school attendance up to the age of 16 and disapprove of appeals by foreign imams to keep sexually mature girls under the age of 16 at home.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

To counter undesired foreign influence, the authorities have proposed training imams who practice in the country so that they will have at least basic knowledge of the Dutch language and of the country's prevailing norms and social values. Given the strict separation between the State and religion, the authorities themselves cannot organize such training. Although the Theological University of

Kampen and the Protestant Free University of Amsterdam have started providing religious courses to Muslims, no institution currently provides local training for imams because the various Islamic organizations cannot agree on the modalities of such training; financing also poses a problem. As an interim measure, the Government has decided that all imams and other spiritual leaders recruited in Islamic countries first must follow a 1-year integration course before they are allowed to practice in the country.

Disputes have arisen when the exercise of the rights to freedom of religion and speech has clashed with the strictly enforced ban on discrimination. Such disputes are addressed either in the courts or by antidiscrimination boards. Complaints have repeatedly been filed against religious or political spokesmen who publicly condemned homosexuality. However, longstanding jurisprudence dictates that such statements made on religious grounds do not constitute a criminal offense absent an intention to offend or discriminate against homosexuals.

The Equal Opportunities Committee (CGB) and the courts have also repeatedly addressed the headscarf issue. The prevailing opinion is that the wearing of headscarves only may be banned on narrow grounds, such as security considerations or inconsistency with an official government uniform. However, in March, the CGB stated that a recent ban by Amsterdam schools on wearing burqas in class is not discriminatory. The CGB stated that open teacher-student and student to student interaction is more important than the right to wear a burqa.

In other areas, employers have been rebuked publicly by antidiscrimination boards for failure to allow non-Christians to take leave from work on their religious holidays, for objecting to Sikhs wearing turbans or to Muslim women wearing headscarves, or for objecting to observance of food requirements on religious grounds. In 1999 the Equal Opportunities Committee ruled against a company that had denied employment to a Turkish applicant because he intended to attend Friday service at a mosque. This was considered a violation of freedom of religion. According to the Committee, Friday service for Muslims is equivalent to Sunday service for Christians. It ruled that employers are obliged to take account of reasonable religious demands from their employees, except in exceptional circumstances.

In March, new legislation took effect that explicitly permits employees to refuse to work on Sunday for religious reasons, unless the work's nature, such as in the health sector, does not permit such an exception. The legislation came in the wake of charges by the Calvinist Reformed Social Union of religious discrimination by employers and reports of job applicants being turned down for employment for refusing to work on Sundays for religious reasons.

The Government has issued a formal exception to the entry ban against Reverend and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon, founders of the Unification Church, under the terms of the Schengen Treaty.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Religious communities have tended to live alongside each other in harmony. Among them, the Protestant denominations in particular have both promoted the Jewish cause and reached out to the Islamic community. However, in the fall of 2001, widespread societal resentment of growing numbers of Muslims and their culture became apparent. Populist politician Pim Fortuyn, who was killed shortly before the May 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.

In the months following September 2001, the country witnessed a number of incidents targeted against Muslims, mosques, and Muslim institutions, including harassment, verbal abuse, acts of vandalism, arson, and defacing of mosques. By the end of 2001, these incidents largely had subsided; however, individual Muslims continue to face harassment and threats. Muslims also face continuing criticism for such perceived problems as the poor integration of Muslim immigrants into society, the high level of criminal activity among Muslim youth, and the conservative views of orthodox Muslims on topics such as women, homosexuals, and corporal punishment. Although politicians generally refrain from anti-Islamic rhetoric, members of the Muslim immigrant community have criticized the perceived tendency of both

some politicians and the media to characterize Muslims as criminals and backward religious fanatics.

The escalating conflict between Israel and the Palestinians also caused a backlash in society. Several monitoring organizations observed an increase in anti-Semitic incidents. Most anti-Semitic incidents were non-violent and involved the chanting or painting of anti-Semitic slogans, the use of swastikas, distribution of neo-Nazi propaganda, and individuals making the Hitler salute. However, pockets of militant young Muslims, mostly Moroccans, on a number of occasions have assaulted or intimidated identifiable Jews. The Center for Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI) observed a continued rise in anti-Semitic incidents in 2002–2003, particularly assaults, intimidation, and verbal attacks, perpetrated mostly by Moroccan youths; however, there were no serious attacks on synagogues or Jewish institutions or shops. In addition to the anti-Semitic acts carried out by a relatively small group of Arab youths, the virulent anti-Israel sentiment among certain groups in society, such as the Arab European League and the Stop the Occupation movement, also have contributed to an anti-Semitic atmosphere.

The labor federations have been working to include in collective bargaining agreements stipulations that permit non-Christian employees to take leave on non-Christian religious holidays. Such stipulations now have been included in most agreements.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the overall context of the promotion of human rights. Promoting religious freedom around the world is a high-priority goal of the Government's foreign policy. The U.S. Embassy works very closely with the Government to promote religious freedom.

As OSCE Chairman-in-Office in 2003, the Government hosted a conference on anti-Semitism in Vienna.

NORWAY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, which is 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. Muslims continued to encounter some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques.

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 150,000 square miles, and its population is approximately 4.5 million. Citizens are considered to be members of the state church unless they explicitly associate themselves with another denomination; 86 percent of the population nominally belong to the state church. However, actual church attendance is considered to be rather low. Other denominations operate freely.

In 2002 a total of 277,366 persons were registered in religious communities outside the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway. An additional 27,126 persons belong to unregistered communities.

The major registered religions and religious groups are: Islam (68,099 members); Pentecostal congregations (44,441 members); Roman Catholic Church (43,264 members); Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway (21,289 members); members of the Jehovah's Witnesses (14,686 members); Methodist Church of Norway (12,766 members); Norwegian Baptist Union (10,288 members); Church of Norway Mission Covenantants (8,445 members); and the Buddhist Federation (8,503 members). Other groups include Orthodox Jews, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church, and Hindus. In addition, there is one main organization for the nonreligious or atheists, which is the Norwegian Humanist Association. The Association has 69,807 registered adult members and 10,000 children as associate members. Persons cannot register as full members until they reach early adulthood.

Members of registered religious communities outside the state church are concentrated in the Oslo region and the west coast region of the country. The Hordaland, Rogaland, and Vest Agder districts have the highest number of members of religious communities outside the state church. The majority of European and American immigrants are either Christians or nonreligious, the exception being Muslim refugees from Bosnia and Kosovo. Most non-European immigrants practice Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism.

Foreign missionaries and other religious workers operate freely in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The 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 one-half of the Cabinet belong to this church. The relationship between the Church and the State regularly generates discussion. Church officials and some politicians have spoken in favor of a greater separation in the state-church relationship. In March 2002, a Commission, appointed by the National Council of the Church of Norway, presented its report after 4 years work on evaluating the church-state relationship in the country. The report called "The Same Church A New Order" concluded that the strong ties between church and state should be loosened. The Commission recommended that all passages in the Constitution that mention the Church of Norway or the Lutheran belief be amended to reflect the country's multicultural and multi-religious society. During the spring of 2002, all Parish Councils in the Church of Norway commented on the report and discussed the issue extensively. On March 14, the Government appointed an official State-Church Commission to review the future of the relationship. The Commission has its own secretariat and has members from several parts of society, including different church groups and other religions, politicians, legal experts, and the Sami people. The Commission is expected to present its assessment to Parliament at the end of 2005.

A religious community is required to register with the Government only if it desires state support, which is provided to all registered denominations on a proportional basis in accordance with membership.

Foreign religious workers from countries whose citizens the Government requires visas from need to obtain such visas before entering the country. In addition, all foreign religious workers from countries outside the European Union or European Economic Area must apply for work permits. There is no government registration of foreign religious workers beyond the regularly established database of issued work permits.

A 1995 law introduced the subject "Religious Knowledge and Education in Ethics" in the school system. The course covers world religions and philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, based on the country's history and the importance of Christianity to society, the course devotes more time to Christianity. All children must attend this mandatory class, and there are no exceptions for children of other faiths; on special grounds students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts such as church services or prayer, but they may not forgo instruction in the subject as a whole. In 2001 independent education experts evaluated the course and presented a report to Parliament. Based on the report, Parliament concluded that it should be easier for parents to request that their children be exempted from parts of the class. In June 2001, Parliament directed the Ministry of Education to draft a standard form for this purpose, which was sent to all schools with instruction on its implementation. Organizations for atheists as well as Muslim communities have contested the legality of forced religious teaching. The Norwegian Humanist Association contested the teaching of the subject in the courts claiming that it is a breach of freedom of religion and parents' rights to provide religious instruction to their children. In August 2001, the Supreme Court unanimously rejected the claims from the Humanist Association. In February 2002, the Humanist Association appealed the case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg; the case remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Muslims encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where they are concentrated. Since 1975 the town council in Drammen has regularly turned down applications to build a mosque.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits prospective employers to ask job applicants for positions in private or religious schools, or in day care centers, whether they agree to teach and behave in accordance with the institutions or religion's beliefs and principles.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

A Cooperation Council for Faith and Secular Society consists of the state church and other religious communities, including the Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and secular humanist communities. The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs works to facilitate closer coordination and international cooperation.

The Ecumenical Council of Christian Communities has been active in promoting cooperation within the Christian community. There also has been cooperation between the various religious communities on human rights issues in the past several years. Bilateral dialog between the state church and the Muslim and Jewish communities has generated statements in support of minority rights and human rights.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, particularly during the annual meeting of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in the overall context of the promotion of human rights.

POLAND

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

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, skinheads and other marginal elements of society continued to carry out sporadic incidents of harassment and violence against Jews and occasional desecration of Jewish and, more frequently, Catholic cemeteries.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. U.S. Embassy and Consulate General Krakow officers actively monitor threats to religious freedom and seek further resolution of unsettled legacies of the Holocaust and the Communist era.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 120,725 square miles, and its population is an estimated 39 million. More than 96 percent of citizens are Roman Catholic; however, Eastern Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and much smaller Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim congregations meet freely.

According to the 2002 Annual Statistical Yearbook of Poland, the following figures represent the formal membership of the listed religious groups but not the number of actual persons in those religious communities—for example, the actual number of Jews in the country is estimated at between 10,000 and 30,000, while the formal membership of the Union of Jewish Communities totals only 1,222. There are an estimated 34,498,271 baptized Roman Catholics; 510,512 Orthodox Church members; 123,000 Greek Catholics; 123,034 members of Jehovah's Witnesses; 86,880 Lutherans (Augsburg); 24,288 Old Catholic Mariavits; 22,422 members of the Polish-Catholic Church; 20,027 Pentecostals; 9,416 Seventh-day Adventists; 4,300 Baptists; 5,211 members of the New Apostolic Church; 5,123 members of the Muslim Religious Union; 5,043 Hare Krishnas; 4,377 Methodists; 3,617 members of the Church of Christ; 3,583 Lutherans (Reformed); 2,553 Catholic Mariavits; 1,222 members of the Union of Jewish Communities; 1,012 members of the Eastern Old Ceremonial Church; and 150 members of the Karaims Religious Union. Each of these religious groups has a relationship with the State governed by either legisla-

tion or treaty, with the exception of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Greek Catholic Church, the New Apostolic Church, the Church of Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna), and the Church of Christ.

According to a 2001 poll, approximately 58 percent of citizens actively participate in religious ceremonies at least once per week. In a 1999 poll, 8 percent of respondents declared that they have no contact with the Catholic Church; an estimated 34 percent declared that they attend church irregularly or sporadically; and approximately 3 percent declared themselves to be nonbelievers. The survey also found women to be more religious than men, with 64 percent of the former attending church regularly, compared with 52 percent of the latter. Farmers are the most religious occupational group, with 69 percent attending church regularly. No figures are available on the number of atheists in the country.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Criminal Code stipulates that offending religious sentiment through public speech is punishable by a fine or up to a 3-year prison term. The Roman Catholic Church is the dominant religion in the country.

There are 15 religious groups whose relationship with the State is governed by specific legislation that outlines the internal structure of the religious groups, their activities, and procedures for property restitution. There are 139 other registered religious groups that do not have a statutorily defined relationship with the State. All registered religious groups, including the original 15, enjoy equal protection under the law.

Religious communities may register with the Government; however, they are not required to do so and may function freely without registration. According to 1998 regulations, registration requires that the group submit the names of at least 100 members as well as information regarding the group itself. This information on membership must be confirmed by a notary public, although the registration itself often appears to be a formality. No new religious communities registered during the period covered by this report. All registered religious groups share the same privileges, such as duty-free importation of office equipment and reduced taxes.

Citizens enjoy the freedom to practice any faith that they choose. Religious groups may organize, select, and train personnel, solicit and receive contributions, publish, and meet without government interference. There are no government restrictions on establishing and maintaining places of worship.

The law places Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish communities on the same legal footing, and the Government attempts to address the problems that minority religious groups may face.

Foreign missionaries are subject only to the standard rules applicable to foreigners temporarily in the country.

Although the Constitution gives parents the right to bring up their children in compliance with their own religious and philosophical beliefs, religious education classes continue to be taught in the public schools at public expense. While children are supposed to have the choice between religious instruction and ethics, the Ombudsman's office states that, in most schools, ethics courses are not offered due to financial constraints. Although Catholic Church representatives teach the vast majority of religious classes in the schools, parents may request religious classes in any of the religions legally registered, including Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish religious instruction. While it is not common, such non-Catholic religious instruction exists in practice, and the Ministry of Education pays the instructors. Priests and other instructors receive salaries from the State for teaching religion in public schools, and Catholic Church representatives are included on a commission that determines whether books qualify for school use.

Five Catholic religious holidays (Easter Monday, Corpus Christi Day, Assumption of the Virgin Mary, All Saints' Day, and St. Stephen's Day) are national holidays.

In 1998 the Concordat, a treaty regulating relations between the Government and the Vatican signed in 1993, was ratified by Parliament, signed by the President, and took effect. The vote came after years of bitter disputes between Concordat supporters and opponents over whether the treaty simply provides the Catholic Church's rights or blurs the line between Church and State. Since 1998 the Government and the Catholic Church each have established groups that meet regularly to discuss Church-State relations.

The Government continues to work with both local and international religious groups to address property claims and other sensitive issues stemming from Nazi- and Communist-era confiscations and persecutions. The Government enjoys generally good relations with international Jewish groups. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is largely responsible for coordinating relations between the Government and these organizations, although President Aleksander Kwasniewski also plays an important role. The Government cooperates effectively with a variety of international organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, for the preservation of historic sites, including cemeteries and houses of worship. However, contentious issues regarding property restitution and preservation of sacred monuments and historic cemeteries remain only partially settled.

Progress continues in implementing the laws that permit local religious communities to submit claims for property owned prior to World War II that subsequently was nationalized. A 1997 law, which mirrors legislation benefiting other religious communities, permits the local Jewish community to submit claims for such property. These laws allow for the return of churches and synagogues, cemeteries, and community headquarters, as well as buildings that were used for other religious, educational, or charitable activities. The laws included time limits for filing claims; these deadlines have expired in recent years, and no additional claims may be filed. However, restitution commissions composed of representatives of the Government and the religious community are continuing adjudication of previously filed claims.

The time limit for applications by the Catholic Church expired in 1991. By the end of the reporting period, 2,780 of the 3,054 claims filed by the Church had been concluded, with 1,325 claims settled by agreement between the Church and the party in possession of the property (usually the national or a local government); 866 properties were returned through decision of the Commission on Property Restitution, which rules on disputed claims; and 532 claims were rejected. Claims by the local Jewish community, whose deadline for filing claims under the 1997 law expired on May 11, 2002, number 5,236. The Commission on Property Restitution considered 1,472 cases; 431 were closed, 155 by a financial agreement between the parties and 97 with ownership transferred. A total of 159 cases were discontinued. The Lutheran Church, for which the filing deadline was July 1996, filed claims for 1,200 properties. Of these, 709 cases were closed with the return of the properties in question. A total of 120 claims were filed with the Commission for the Orthodox Church, of which 57 were closed.

The laws on communal property restitution do not address the issue of communal properties to which third parties now have title, leaving several controversial and complicated cases unresolved. In a number of cases over several years, buildings and residences were built on land that included Jewish cemeteries that were destroyed during or after World War II.

The Government cooperates with the country's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to promote religious tolerance and lends support to activities such as the March of the Living, an event to honor victims of the Holocaust. In June the Government held a major international conference to unveil its proposal to open an international center for human rights education in Oswiecim.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. In 2001 the Government established a department within the Ministry of Interior to monitor the activities of "new religious groups" and "cults." In April 2002, the Government closed the department; however, an employee of the Interior Ministry's Public Order Department continues to monitor religious movements.

Although the Constitution provides for the separation of religion and state, crucifixes hang in both the upper and lower houses of Parliament, as well as in many government offices.

State-run radio broadcasts Catholic Mass on Sundays, and the Catholic Church is authorized to relicense radio and television stations to operate on frequencies assigned to the Church, the only body outside the National Radio and Television Broadcasting Council allowed to do so.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, skinheads and other marginal elements of society continued to carry out sporadic incidents of harassment and violence against Jews and occasional desecration of Jewish and, more often, Catholic cemeteries.

Orthodox religious officials reported accounts of discrimination towards the Orthodox community. There were reports of less than proportional funds for cultural events associated with the Orthodox community, layoffs in which Orthodox employees were the first dismissed, and an attitude in the local press depicting Catholicism as necessary for true citizenship.

In June the National Remembrance Institute (IPN) concluded its investigation of the circumstances surrounding the 1941 massacre of the Jewish Population in Jedwabne. The IPN determined that there were at least 340 victims in the Jedwabne killings and that approximately 40 citizens committed the murders. The official investigation concluded after 3 years without finding sufficient evidence to charge any of the surviving perpetrators.

Anti-Semitic feelings persist among certain sectors of the population, occasionally manifesting themselves in acts of vandalism and physical or verbal abuse. However, surveys in the past several years show a continuing decline in anti-Semitic sentiment, and avowedly anti-Semitic candidates have won few elections. However, some far-right Members of Parliament made anti-Semitic remarks in a parliamentary debate over the activities of the IPN.

Sporadic and isolated incidents of harassment and violence against Jews continue to occur in the country, often generated by skinheads and other marginal societal groups. Occasional cases of cemetery desecration, including both Jewish and, more frequently, Catholic shrines, also occurred during the period covered by this report.

On September 1, 2002, 70 tombstones in Czeladz were knocked down or desecrated with anti-Semitic and Nazi slogans; a police investigation remained pending at year's end. During a 2-day period in September 2002, 70 tombstones were knocked down in a Jewish cemetery in Wroclaw. Approximately 400 citizens volunteered in a subsequent campaign to make repairs.

In April during the 12th March of the Living from Auschwitz to Birkenau to honor victims of the Holocaust, several hundred citizens joined 1,500 marchers from Israel and other countries. Polish President Kwasniewski, visiting Israeli President Moshe Katsav, and Israel's former Chief Rabbi Meir Lau delivered speeches. Schoolchildren, boy scouts, the Polish-Israeli Friendship Society, Polish survivors of Auschwitz, and the Polish Union of Jewish Students participated in the march.

On April 30, 2003, members of the Polish Council for Christians and Jews commemorated the 60th anniversary of the 1943 anti-Nazi uprising in Warsaw's Jewish Ghetto with visits to memorial sites connected with the city's former Jewish quarter.

Following the resolution in 2002 of a dispute between Gdansk's local Jewish community and the leadership of the Union of Jewish Communities, the Gdansk group, as well as Jewish communities in Poznan and Wroclaw, have successfully registered their organizations with the Interior Ministry.

There is some public concern about the growth of groups perceived to be "sects" and the influence of nonmainstream religious groups, especially during the summer travel season when young persons travel to camps and other gatherings. Articles have appeared in the press and on the Internet reporting the involvement of "sects" in disappearances.

Interfaith groups work to bring together the various religious groups in the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Representatives of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate General Krakow continue to monitor closely issues relating to religious freedom and interfaith relations; for example, one officer devotes a majority of time to questions of Polish and Jewish relations. Embassy and Consulate officers meet frequently with representatives of religious communities, the Government, and local authorities on such matters as property restitution, skinhead harassment, and interfaith cooperation.

Embassy and consulate officers actively monitor threats to religious freedom. On a regular basis, Embassy and Consulate officials discuss issues of religious freedom, including property restitution, with a wide range of government officials at all levels. The Embassy and Consulate General also work to facilitate the protection and return of former Jewish cemeteries throughout the country. The Embassy and the Consulate General play a continuing role in ongoing efforts to establish an international foundation to oversee restitution of Jewish communal property.

Embassy and consulate representatives, including the Ambassador, also regularly meet with representatives of major religious communities, including leaders of the Jewish community, both in the capital and during travels throughout the country.

The public affairs sections of the Embassy and the Consulate in Krakow provided continuing support for activities designed to promote cultural and religious tolerance. Those activities included providing a Democracy Commission grant to the Union of Jewish Religious Communities for use in building a database of claimable Jewish communal property, sponsoring a nation-wide conference to support NGO promotion of religious and ethnic tolerance, and continuing press and public affairs support for the Auschwitz Jewish Center Foundation's education project in Oswiecim. The Embassy supported an annual local NGO-sponsored event, "Days of Tolerance," in Kolobrzeg that brought together youths of various religious and ethnic backgrounds.

PORTUGAL

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

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; there are a number of government- and privately-sponsored activities that contribute to interfaith understanding.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 35,672 square miles, and the population as of 2001 was estimated to be 10 million. More than 80 percent of the population above the age of 12 identify with the Roman Catholic Church; however, a large percentage state that they do not participate actively in church activities. Approximately 4 percent identify with various Protestant denominations (including about 250,000 Evangelists) and approximately 1 percent with non-Christian religions. Less than 3 percent state that they have no religion.

Practitioners of non-Christian religions include about 35,000 Muslims (largely from Portuguese Africa, who are ethnically sub-Saharan African or South Asian), approximately 700 Jews, and very small numbers of Buddhists, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. There is also a Hindu community of about 7,000 persons, which largely traces its origins to South Asians who emigrated from Portuguese Africa and the former Portuguese colony of Goa in India. Many of these minority communities are not organized formally.

Over 24,000 Eastern Europeans have immigrated to the country in the last year; there were more than over 100,000 in the previous 2 years. Over half of these immigrants were from the Ukraine. Many are Eastern Orthodox. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) reports 35,000 members. Brazilian syncretistic Catholic Churches, which combine Catholic ritual with pre-Christian Afro-Brazilian ritual, such as Candomble and Umbanda, also operate in small numbers, as do the Seventh-day Adventists. The Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God), a proselytizing church that originated in Brazil, also exists. The Church of Scientology has approximately 200 active members, primarily in the Lisbon area.

Foreign missionary groups, such as the Mormons, operate freely.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full, and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution forbids 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 Concordata (as amended in 1971) between Portugal and the Holy See.

The Religious Freedom Act, passed in April 2001, created a legislative framework for religions established in the country for at least 30 years, or those recognized internationally for at least 60 years. The Act provides qualifying religions with benefits previously reserved for the Catholic Church: Full tax-exempt status, legal recognition for marriage and other rites, chaplain visits to prisons and hospitals, and respect for traditional holidays. It allows for each religion to negotiate its own Concordata-style agreement with the Government, although it does not ensure the acceptance of any such agreements. The Act also called for an independent consultative commission within the Justice Ministry to oversee the application of the Act. Some religions protested the fact that the Catholic Church, although exempt from the Act, was granted membership on the Commission. The Act specified that rules must be established within 60 days after its passage; however, the Government has not yet created rules enabling this legislation.

The Catholic Church maintains a separate agreement with the Government under the 1940 terms of the Concordata. To comply constitutionally with the Religious Freedom Act, the Government began negotiations with the Vatican to amend the Concordata; these negotiations continued during the period covered by this report. The Vatican is seeking to remove language requiring it to consult the Government when appointing bishops, as well as language outlining its role and responsibilities in former Portuguese possessions. In the interim, the existing Concordata remains in force.

Public secondary school curriculums include an optional course called "religion and morals." This course functions as a survey of world religions and is taught by a layperson. It can be used to give instruction on the Catholic religion; the Catholic Church must approve all teachers for this course. Other religions may set up such a course if they have 10 or more children in the particular school. For example, the Evangelical Alliance held 243 classes in schools during the 2002–03 school year. Under the 2001 Act, each religion may approve the course's respective instructor.

Under the Concordata, major Catholic holidays also are official holidays. Seven of the country's 16 national holidays are Catholic holidays.

The Diocese of Leiria-Fatima is seeking funding to establish a cable television station.

The Government takes active steps to promote interfaith understanding. Most notably 5 days a week the state television channel (Radiotelevisao Portuguesa 2) broadcasts "A Fe dos Homens"—"The Faith of Man"—a half-hour program consisting of various segments written and produced by different religious communities. The Government pays for the segments, and professional production companies are hired under contract to produce the segments. Religious communities send delegates to a special television commission, which determines the scheduling of segments. The television commission has operated on the general rule that religious communities eligible for the program are those that have been operating for at least 30 years in the country or at least 60 years in their country of origin. The Catholic Church receives 22.5 minutes of programming time per episode, while the remaining 7.5 minutes is divided among the other religions. The Evangelical Alliance receives two 7.5-minute segments per week, while other participating religions receive approximately one 7.5-minute segment per month. The Catholic Church has a program of its own called "70x7," while other religious faiths work together to schedule programming on the "Caminhos" ("Paths") broadcast every Sunday morning.

Lisbon City Hall provided matching funds for completion of the city's mosque, which was not completed at the end of the period covered by this report. The municipality also provided matching funds for the restoration of Lisbon's 19th century synagogue, considered a building of historic significance. The municipality of Lisbon also provides the opportunity for the religious communities to participate in summer festival events.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Catholic Church receives some preferential treatment; for example, chief chaplaincies for the military, prisons, and hospitals remain state-funded positions for Roman Catholics only. The Papal Nuncio is always the dean of the diplomatic corps. The Church of Scientology, although recognized as a religious association since 1986, does not benefit from the 2001 Religious Freedom Act, as it has not been established in the country for 30 years or recognized internationally for 60 years, as required under the law. The Church's leaders are concerned that exclusion from the benefits accorded under the Act may have a negative impact on their ability to practice their faith; however, they reported no discrimination or opposition during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are amicable relations among the various religious communities. Participation among the various faiths in crafting the programming schedule for "A Fe dos Homens" has facilitated greater understanding and enhanced mutual respect. Many communities conduct "open houses" or sponsor interfaith education seminars.

The residents of the Azores archipelago, although traditionally Catholic, are also quite tolerant of other faiths. Both Mormon and Baptist missionaries are active on the islands. They are well treated and participate in Azorean social life.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

ROMANIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion; while the Government generally respects this right in practice, there are some restrictions, and several minority religious groups continued to claim credibly that low-level government officials impeded their efforts at proselytizing, as well as interfered with other religious activities.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continues to differentiate between recognized and unrecognized religions and registration and recognition requirements still pose obstacles to minority religions. In May the Government decided after a period of delays to enforce a 2000 Supreme Court ruling requiring that Jehovah's Witnesses be recognized as an official religion; although this represents a major step forward, it does not solve recognition problems in general. The Government has made no further effort to adopt a new law regulating religions, and there are no prospects for the submission of such a draft law to Parliament in the near future. In June 2002, Parliament passed a law restituting church property held by the State but its implementation has been slow. The law does not address churches that belonged previously to the Greek Catholic Church and now are held by the Orthodox Church.

The process of granting construction permits for places of worship was smooth in general, but some minority religions continued to complain of lengthy delays. New government legislation on foreigners no longer limits visa extensions to 6 months and introduces a long-stay visa for religious activities. It is as yet unclear as to whether these measures will apply to members of unrecognized religions.

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups; however, the Romanian Orthodox Church has shown some hostility toward non-Orthodox religious churches and criticized the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church repeatedly has described as "sects." The Orthodox Church continues to oppose the return of the Greek Catholic churches it had 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 in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy met with the Government and religious leaders to encourage respect for religious freedom and urged the restitution of religious property seized under the Communists.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 91,799 square miles, and its population is approximately 21.7 million.

The Romanian Orthodox Church is the predominant religion in the country. The Government officially recognizes 17 religions: The Romanian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Old Rite Christian 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, recognized as a religion in May. However, members of other faiths worship freely, but are not afforded various forms of state support. The latest available official figures on the number of believers of the recognized religious denominations date from the March 2002 census.

According to the 2002 census, the Romanian Orthodox Church had 18,817,975 members (86.8 percent of the population). The Roman Catholic Church had 1,026,429 members. The Catholic Church of Byzantine Rite (Greek Catholics or Uniates) had 191,556 members. This figure is disputed by the Greek Catholic Church, which claims that there were many irregularities such as census takers refusing to note Greek Catholic affiliation and automatically assuming Orthodox affiliation, which led to an inaccurate result. The Greek Catholic Church estimated in 2003 that its adherents number over 790,000 members. (Greek Catholics were former members of the Romanian Orthodox Church who accept principles that were required for union of the Orthodox church with the Roman Catholic Church in 1697, but continue to maintain many Orthodox observations and many Orthodox traditions). The Old Rite Christian 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 has 18,178 members. The Evangelical Augustinian Church had 8,716 members. The Lutheran Evangelical Church Synod-Presbyterian had 27,112 members. The Unitarian Church of Romania had 66,944 members. The Baptist Church had 126,639 members. The Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church) had 324,462 members. The Seventh-day Christian Adventist Church had 93,670 members; the Armenian Church had 687 members. There were 6,075 Jews, according to the 2002 census (the Jewish Community Federation states that there are approximately 12,000 members). Muslims numbered 67,257. According to the same census, the number of atheists was 8,524, and there were 12,825 persons who do not have any religious affiliation.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, most religions have followers dispersed throughout the country, although a few religious communities are concentrated in particular regions. Old Rite members (Lippovans) are located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Most Muslims are located in the southeastern part of the country in Dobrogea (near Bulgaria and the coast). Most Greek Catholics are in Transylvania but there are also Greek Catholics in Moldavia. Protestant and Catholic believers tend to be in Transylvania, but many also are located around Bacau. Orthodox or Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians are mostly in the northwestern part of the country. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are in Banat. Armenians are in Moldavia and the south.

According to published sources, the Baha'i Faith, the Family (God's Children), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Unification Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, and Zen Buddhism are active denominations in the country.

According to a nationwide poll conducted in October 2002, 1 percent of those polled said they go to church on a daily basis; 4 percent of those polled said that they go to church several times per week; 18 percent stated that they go to church once a week; 21 percent claim to go several times per month; 37 percent attend services only on Christmas, Easter, and other religious holidays; 11 percent go to church once a year or less; and 7 percent do not go to church at all. The same poll shows that 88 percent of citizens say that church is the institution they trust most.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, however the Government exercises considerable influence over religious life under laws and decrees. The Orthodox church exercises substantial influence in its dominant role among a majority of the population and policymakers, including the commission for construction of new places of worship. Government registration and recognition requirements still pose obstacles to minority religions. Several minority religious groups continued to claim credibly that low-level government officials and the Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts at proselytizing, as well as interfered with other religious activities.

A Communist-era decree, number 177 of 1948, remains the basic law governing religious denominations. It allows considerable state control over religious life. Technically almost none of the articles of this law have been abrogated formally; however, according to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, a large number of its articles have been nullified in practice by the Constitution and a series of gov-

ernmental 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. To be recognized as a religion, religious groups must register with the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and present their statutes, organizational, leadership, and management diagrams, and the body of dogma and doctrines formally stated by them. The Government has refused to recognize a number of religious groups since 1990. In March 2000, the Supreme Court ordered that Jehovah's witnesses be recognized. After a long period of persistent refusal to enforce this court ruling, the Government issued order 2,657 of May 22, which grants Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a recognized religion. Jehovah's Witness is the first religious group to gain this status since 1989 (with the exception of the Greek Catholic Church, which was reestablished right after the fall of communism).

Under the provisions of Decree 177 of 1948, the Government recognizes 14 religions. In addition to this, a 1989 decree reestablished the Greek Catholic Church as a recognized religion. The Greek Catholics had been forced to merge with the Romanian Orthodox Church by Communist decree in 1948. The Jehovah's Witnesses were granted religion status in May and the Romanian Evangelical Church, a branch of the Christian Evangelical Church, is now listed as a separate religion. Only the clergy of these recognized religions are eligible to receive state support. Recognized religions 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.

In December 2002, a government decision on local taxes carried a list of the 16 (at that time) officially recognized religions, which had a negative impact on unrecognized religions with regard to taxes on places of worship. Jehovah's Witnesses, who at the time were not formally recognized, were asked in several communities to pay retroactive property taxes on places of worship.

The Government registers religious groups that it does not recognize either as religious and charitable foundations or as cultural associations. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations reported that it licensed 622 religious and charitable foundations, as well as cultural organizations, under Law 21 of 1924 on Juridical Entities, thereby entitling them to juridical status as well as to exemptions from income and customs taxes.

Government decree 26 of 2000 on associations and foundations abrogated Law 21 of 1924 and eliminated most of the bureaucratic obstacles in the registration process. It also eliminated the minimum requirement of members needed to establish religious associations and foundations and the requirement of prior approval by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations for the registration of religious associations. However, 13 religious associations notified the State Secretariat of their registration in 2002. The Government reintroduced the mandatory approval by the State Secretariat for the registration of religious associations by decree 37 of January. As a result of the new procedures, the State Secretariat issued nine approvals in the first half of the year. The applications for 21 other religious groups remained pending.

The number of adherents that each religion had in the 2002 census determines the proportion of the budget each recognized religion receives. The Romanian Orthodox religion receives the largest share of governmental financial support. In addition, Orthodox religious leaders generally preside over state occasions. In 2002 the Government allocated funds amounting to almost \$1.24 million (ROL 40,935 million) to the Orthodox Church, approximately \$50,000 (ROL 1,670 million) to the Roman Catholic Church, close to \$15,000 (ROL 490 million) to the Greek Catholic Church, and approximately \$40,000 (ROL 1,355) to the Reformed Church, for the construction and repair of churches. Most religious groups received less than that to which they would have been entitled, with the exception of the Orthodox (the largest additional amount) and three other Churches.

Government decree 194 of 2002 on foreigners abrogated Law 123 of 2001 and introduced a long-stay visa for religious activities. This visa type requires approval by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations, evidence that the applicants represent a religion recognized by the Government, medical insurance and criminal record review. These conditions could pose difficulties to unrecognized religions. The new law no longer limits visa extensions to 6 months, a provision considered positive by most religious groups. However, some religious groups believe the new provisions make the visa granting process more difficult and would result in restricting

the number of missionary 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 State Secretariat reported that, according to Law 123 of 2001 on foreigners, which stipulated only six-month visas for all categories, approximately 2,400 such extensions were approved for missionaries in 2002.

The regulations issued by the Government in May 2001 for the organization and operation of the commission in charge of granting approvals for the construction of places of worship defines these as “buildings such as churches, houses of prayer, temples, mosques, synagogues, houses of assembly, etc., used by religious denominations, religious associations and foundations for their specific religious services.” However, there are other provisions in these regulations that could make it more difficult for minority (non-Orthodox, whether recognized or unrecognized) religious groups to get such approvals. The commission that approves such permits consists of 11 permanent members. Of the 17 recognized religions, only the Orthodox Church has members on this commission, which also includes government officials and technical experts. In addition, to the technical aspects of building a church, the commission is entitled to decide on the “opportuneness” of building the place of worship, and whether the construction is in line with the specific dogma, doctrines, and statutes of the religion in question. There were no reports that the commission denied any applications; however, there were reports of lengthy delays.

In February 2001, the Government circulated for comment to the then-15 recognized religions an old draft law on religious denominations, which had been withdrawn in 2000 by the previous government under domestic and international pressure for being undemocratic and overly restrictive of the freedom of religion. The draft law would have imposed tough conditions on the registration of religious denominations and religious groups (including a membership of ½ of 1 percent of the country’s population—over 100,000 persons), strengthened the powers of the State Secretary for Religious Denominations, and declared the Orthodox Church to be the national church. Following renewed criticism, the draft law was put on hold. Despite its intentions to redistribute to religious denominations a new draft law at the end of 2002 or the beginning of 2003, after prior consultation with the Council of Europe and other international organizations, the Government failed to do so. According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, the draft law is in a preliminary stage and consultations with foreign experts on this issue will take place this summer. Minority religious groups are not optimistic about the adoption of a law on religious denominations in the near future due to the ongoing Greek Catholic-Orthodox tensions and pressure by the Orthodox Church to be declared the national church.

Minority religious groups assert that they have found central government and parliamentary officials more cooperative than local officials. They specifically reported that relations with the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations have continued to improve.

The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations was moved from the Prime Minister’s office to the Ministry of Culture in 2000; independent observers believe the move indicates a reduction in the Secretariat’s influence.

Following a 1999 Supreme Court ruling the Ministry of Education no longer requires Adventist students to come to school or take exams on Saturdays. However, according to Adventist reports, this is not observed universally; for example, Adventist students still have been called to exams on Saturdays at the University of the West in Timisoara, Department of Letters, History and Theology.

The Baptist and Roman Catholic Churches raised concerns that the Government wanted to transfer “irrevocably and for good” the church property used to endow private church-run universities to the national education system. In July 2002, the decrees establishing the Catholic and Baptist universities were amended to make it clear that the property would be returned to the churches if the religious universities closed for any reason.

During the period covered by this report, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, along with religious denominations and local authorities, sponsored a training course for monastery and church staff (in Durau, Neamt County, in 2002) and a series of symposia with ecumenical participation (in Alba Iulia, Bucharest, Cluj, and Iasi, co-sponsored by the Orthodox Theology Institute, in 2003). In addition, the Minister of Culture played the role of mediator in a long-standing Greek Catholic-Orthodox conflict in Mihalt (Alba County) in June.

In July 2002, the Government established the National Anti-Discrimination Council as an instrument to curb discrimination of any kind (including on religious grounds). Since its establishment, the council has received three complaints of discrimination on religious grounds.

Christmas and the Orthodox Easter are national holidays, but this does not appear to affect any of the other religious groups. Members of the other recognized

religions that celebrate Easter are entitled by law to have an additional holiday. Religious leaders occasionally play a role in politics. In particular, many Orthodox leaders make public appearances alongside prominent political figures on various occasions.

Most mainstream politicians have criticized anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia publicly. President Ion Iliescu, Prime Minister Adrian Nastase, and several members of the cabinet (the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Culture and Religious Denominations, and others) made public statements on various occasions against extremism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia and criticized attempts to deny the Holocaust in the country. During the period covered by this report, the Government sponsored seminars and symposia on anti-Semitism in Bucharest in June, and the history of the Holocaust was included among subjects to be studied at the National Defense College and in high schools. The Government also funded the publication of several books on anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. In March 2002, the Government issued two decrees aimed at combating anti-Semitism: Decree 31, which bans fascist, racist, or xenophobic organizations and symbols and prohibits fostering the cult of personality of war criminals and Decree 36, which protects Jewish cemeteries and synagogues. In accordance with ordinance 31, three statues of Antonescu located on public land (in Piatra Neamt, Slobozia, and Letcani) were taken down at the end of March and in the first half of April 2002. A Marshal Ion Antonescu square in Piatra Neamt was renamed at the end of April 2002. A total of 10 of the 14 Marshal Antonescu streets existing nationwide were renamed. One of the localities where the street name has not been changed is Cluj, where the mayor, a member of the extremist "Greater Romania" Party, has repeatedly opposed the change. On May 4, the Government inaugurated a memorial of the Holocaust in Targu Mures, a Transylvanian town under Hungarian administration in World War II.

In June, on the occasion of the approval of the agreement between the U.S.-based Holocaust Memorial Museum and Romania's National Archives, the Government issued a communique that denied the occurrence of a Holocaust within its borders. Faced with a huge wave of domestic and international criticism, the Government issued a second communique, in which it admitted that the pro-Nazi regime had committed serious war crimes against the Jews and assumed responsibility for the participation of the country's former rulers in the Holocaust.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although protected by law, several minority religious groups, which include both recognized and unrecognized religions, made credible complaints that low-level government officials and Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts to proselytize, interfered in religious activities, and otherwise discriminated against them during the period covered by this report. Due to its substantial influence, few politicians sponsor bills and measures that would oppose the Orthodox Church. Local officials tend to be tolerant but often are pressured and intimidated by the Orthodox clergy. According to one official of the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, such cases are caused by personal feuds at the local level and overly aggressive attitudes by minority religious groups toward the Orthodox Church. In some instances, local police and administrative authorities tacitly supported, at times violent, societal campaigns against proselytizing. There is no law against proselytizing, nor is there a clear understanding by the authorities of what activities constitute proselytizing.

Representatives of religious groups that sought recognition after 1990 allege that the registration process was arbitrary and unduly influenced by the Romanian Orthodox Church, and that they did not receive clear instructions concerning the requirements. The Organization of the Orthodox Believers of Old Rite, the Adventist Movement for Reform, the Baha'i Faith, and the Mormons are some of the religious groups that have tried unsuccessfully to register as religions. The Baha'i Faith stated that it has never received an answer to its repeated requests to be registered as a religious denomination. Although a 2000 court ruling ordered the recognition of the Jehovah's Witnesses as a religion, the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations consistently refused to implement it. In May the Ministry eventually issued order number 2657 granting Jehovah's Witnesses all the rights of a religion. Prior to this order, the Ministry had issued another order in October 2002, which, although pretending to enforce the 2000 court ruling, actually declared Jehovah's Witnesses an association. The October order was nullified by the Bucharest Court of Appeal's in February.

One explanation given by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations for a failure to register new religions was that recognition requires a decree issued by the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, a Communist-era institution that no longer exists. Since no new legislation has been passed in this regard, the State

Secretariat stated that the registration of any new religion is not possible. While this appears to have been overtaken by the Supreme Court's demand that Jehovah's Witnesses be recognized, the confusing set of laws governing recognition appears to have impeded the process.

Unrecognized religions receive no financial support from the State, other than limited tax and import duty exemptions, and are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities.

Religious minorities made credible complaints about irregularities during the 2002 census, including failures by census-takers to ask for religious affiliation; census-takers who did not know or refused to write down the appropriate code for a minority religion, who suggested the answer to the question on religious affiliation, and who tried to influence the answers. The Greek Catholic Church, the Catholic Church, and the Baha'i Faith complained about such irregularities.

In addition, representatives of several minority religious groups complain that allocation of off-budget funds (special funds maintained by the Government for use in cases of emergency) is biased towards the Romanian Orthodox Church. For example, the Government gave the Orthodox Church \$2.75 million (ROL 91 billion) and the Hungarian churches \$103,000 (ROL 3.4 billion). Some minority religious groups also complained that Orthodox churches were built in areas without Orthodox believers. According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, off-budget funds are distributed depending on the needs of the various religious denominations.

While the May 2001 regulations for the permits commission no longer differentiate between recognized religions and unrecognized religions in terms of the types of places of worship that can be built, they include provisions that could make approvals more difficult to obtain. For example, the commission is entitled to decide on the "opportuneness" of building the place of worship. While most minority religions reported that they had received permits to build places of worship without any difficulty, some of them made credible complaints that these regulations generated delays in the process. According to Evangelical Alliance reports, although this Church's requests for permits were approved by central authorities, its intention to build places of prayer have been obstructed at the local level, in particular in localities where the mayor is an Orthodox priest, such as in Baiculesti (Arges County). After the publication of the government list of the then-16 officially recognized religions, Jehovah's Witnesses were denied construction permits in several localities (Barlad, Vaslui County, Bals, Olt County). This situation persisted until its inclusion in this list in May.

In 2002 the Commission approved 246 applications for the construction of places of worship. Of the 246 permits, 128 were granted to the Orthodox Church, 8 to the Catholic Church, 26 to the Greek Catholic Church, 15 to the Reformed Church, 22 to the Baptist Church, 15 to the Pentecostal Church, 8 to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 5 to Jehovah's Witnesses, and the rest to other religions. In the first 5 months of 2003, the commission issued 79 permits, as follows: 30 to the Orthodox Church, 4 to the Catholic Church, 6 to the Greek Catholic Church, 3 to the Baptist Church, 4 to the Pentecostal Church, 8 to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and 13 to Jehovah's Witnesses. By the end of the reporting period, 30 applications were pending; the applicants were requested to submit additional data. The law does not prohibit or punish assembly for peaceful religious activities. However, several different minority religious groups complained that on various occasions, local authorities and Orthodox priests prevented religious activities from taking place, even when the groups had been issued permits. The Evangelical Alliance reported difficulties in getting approvals to use public halls for religious activities following pressure by Orthodox priests. After the publication of the 16-religion list and until it was granted religion status in May, the Jehovah's Witnesses were denied permission to hold religious meetings in their own places of worship in several localities (Saliste, Sibiu County). Since this religious group was not included in the 16-religion list, the local authorities asked Jehovah's Witness to pay taxes for land and places of worship retroactively in over 25 localities (Caracal, Olt County; Cismadie, Sibiu County; Hateg, Hunedoara County; Jimbolia, Timis County; Harlau, Iasi County, and others).

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Attendance at the classes is optional. Only the 17 recognized religions are entitled to hold religion classes in public schools. While the law permits instruction according to the faith of students' parents, minority recognized religious groups complain that they have been unable to have classes offered in their faith in public schools. Such cases were reported by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Evangelical Alliance. According to minority religious groups, this happens mostly because the local inspectors for religion classes are Orthodox priests who deny ac-

creditation to teachers of other religions. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that it has been denied access to teach religion in some schools. Religious teachers are permitted to instruct only students of the same religious faith. However, minority religious groups credibly asserted that there were cases of children pressured to attend classes of Orthodox religion. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported such cases in Satu Mare (Satu Mare County) and Balta Sarata (Teleorman County). The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that a member teaching English in Cristesti (Iasi County) was accused of proselytizing and threatened with dismissal by the school director and the mayor, pressured by the Orthodox priest. An investigation by the School Inspectorate found the accusations ungrounded.

Only recognized religions are entitled to give religious assistance to prisoners. Minority recognized religious groups complained that Orthodox priests denied them access to some penitentiaries. Before their recognition in May, the Jehovah's Witnesses had also been denied access to some prisons. The regulations on the organization of religious assistance in penitentiaries forbid proselytizing, stipulating that religious assistance in prisons is coordinated by the prison priest (always an Orthodox priest) and that the Religious Assistance Division in the Ministry of Justice will submit an annual report on religious assistance in prisons to the Ministry of Justice and the Orthodox Patriarchate.

Law 195 of November 2000 entitles recognized religions to have military clergy trained to render religious assistance to conscripts. However, according to minority religions, with the exception of two representatives of the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Alliance, the military clergy is comprised only of Orthodox priests. As a non-recognized religion, ordained ministers of Jehovah's Witnesses were not exempted from alternate military service, as ordained ministers from recognized religions are. Furthermore, according to the group's doctrine, all members are considered to be ordained ministers. Fourteen such ministers have received suspended court sentences in the past. Following an October 2001 Supreme Court ruling declaring that refusal to serve alternate military service is not a crime, the Prosecutor General appealed the sentences by the Military Court of Appeal and the criminal records of the 14 ministers were cleared between November 2002 and May.

The Evangelical Alliance and the Baptist Church have complained that minority religions have limited access to national radio and television in order to broadcast their services and religious messages.

In June 2002, the Parliament passed law 501 restituting religious properties confiscated by the Communist regime. Some religious or communal property had already been returned to former owners as a result of government decrees, or with the agreement of local religious leaders. The center-right government in office between 1996 and 2000 issued 4 decrees and a government decision, which resulted in the restitution of 100 buildings to religious and national minorities. An October 2000 government decree created a commission to consider a list of properties submitted by churches under Decree 94 of 2000. According to this decree, both the Hungarian churches and the Greek Catholic Church would have received buildings. However, following the election of a new Government in 2000, implementation of this decree was halted, and no properties actually have been restituted under the provisions of Decree 94 of 2000. Decree 94/2000 subsequently became the basis of law 501, following the protocol of cooperation between the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Democratic Union of Romanian Hungarians (UDMR).

In many cases religious minorities have not succeeded in regaining actual possession of the properties despite restitution by these decrees. Many properties returned by decree house state offices, schools, hospitals, or cultural institutions that would require relocation, and lawsuits and protests by current possessors have delayed restitution of the property to the rightful owners.

Law 10 of 2001 on nationalized buildings, passed in January 2001, specified that a different law was to address the restitution of communal property. Law 501 should provide for the restitution of all church properties. The buildings used by public institutions (such as museums, schools, and hospitals) are to remain in the tenants' hands for a period of 5 years, during which time they are to pay rent to the churches. The majority of church properties belong to this category. However, this law does not address the distinctive and sensitive issue of the Greek Catholic churches. Some religious denominations criticized the law for failing to include a provision to give other buildings in compensation for the demolished ones. Religious denominations submitted by the final deadline of March 2, 2002, 7,568 applications for restitution, according to Law 501, as follows: Orthodox Church—770; Roman-Catholic Church—992; Greek Catholic Church—2,207; Reformed Church—899; Mosaic cult—1,809; Evangelical Church—690; other denominations—201. However, the restitution process seems rather slow as they must be considered by a national com-

mission, which has held only two meetings. In June the commission decided to reconstitute 70 buildings. The final decisions have yet to be issued.

In early June 2002, the Pope called for the restitution of the Catholic Church properties during a meeting with the country's Ambassador to the Vatican. The authorities interpreted the appeal as not referring to the Greek Catholic Church. To clarify this issue, on June 14, 2002, the Greek Catholic Archbishop addressed an open letter to the President, emphasizing that the Pope, by mentioning the "joint committee of dialog," had meant the Greek Catholic Church. The letter called for a law to reconstitute the churches of this denomination.

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 over 2,600 churches, which were confiscated by the State and then given to the Orthodox Church, along with other facilities. Other properties of the Greek Catholic Church, such as buildings and agricultural land, became state property.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, the Greek Catholic Church has received 270 of the churches transferred by the Communists to the Orthodox Church; the Greek Catholics claim that they have received only 146 such properties. The Greek Catholic Church has very few places of worship. Many followers still are compelled to hold services in public places (over 180 cases, according to Greek Catholic reports) or in parks (4 cases, in Baia Mare, Satu Mare, Sisesti, and Rosia Montana, according to the same reports.) In 1992 the Government adopted a decree that listed 80 properties owned by the Greek Catholic Church to be returned. Between 60 and 65 of them had been returned by the end of the period covered by this report. In some cases, Orthodox priests whose families had been Greek Catholics converted back to Greek Catholicism and brought their parishes and churches back with them to the Greek Catholic Church. In several counties, in particular in Transylvania, local Orthodox leaders have given up smaller country churches voluntarily. For example, in the Diocese of Lugoj in the southwestern part of the country, local Orthodox Church representatives have reached agreement on the return of an estimated 160 churches; however, for the most part Orthodox leaders have refused to return to the Greek Catholics those churches that they acquired during the Communist era. Since July 2002, the Greek Catholic Church has recovered only three churches. Orthodox Archbishop of Timisoara, Nicolae Corneanu, was responsible for returning approximately 50 churches, including the cathedral in Lugoj, to the Greek Catholic Church. However, due to his actions, the Orthodox Holy Synod marginalized Archbishop Corneanu, and his fellow clergymen criticized him.

A 1990 government decree called for the creation of a joint Orthodox and Greek Catholic committee at the national level to decide the fate of churches that had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church before 1948. However, the Government has not enforced this decree, and the Orthodox Church consistently has resisted efforts to resolve the issue in that forum. The committee did not meet until 1998, had three meetings in 1999, and has met on an annual basis since 2000. The courts generally refuse to consider Greek Catholic lawsuits seeking restitution, citing the 1990 decree establishing the joint committee to resolve the issue. From the initial property list of 2,600 seized properties, the Greek Catholic Church has reduced the number of churches that it is asking to be returned to fewer than 300. Only eight churches have been restituted as the result of the joint committee's meetings. Restitution of the existing churches is important to both sides because local residents are likely to attend the church whether it is Greek Catholic or Orthodox. Thus the number of members and share of the state budget allocation for religions is at stake.

At the most recent meeting of the joint committee in Arad on October 1, 2002, the Greek Catholic Church reiterated its core claim: The restitution of its former cathedrals and district churches, and the return of one church in localities where there are two churches and one of them had belonged to the Greek Catholics (or at least to hold the religious service in turns). The Orthodox Church in turn stressed that the will of the majority of believers should be taken into account with regard to restitution and opposed the idea of holding religious services in turns. The next meeting of the national joint committee is scheduled for September. Despite the stated desire for dialog, the Orthodox Church has demolished Greek Catholic churches under various pretexts. For example, Greek Catholic churches (some of them being historical monuments) were demolished in Vadu Izei (Maramures County), Baisoara (Cluj County), Smig (Sibiu County), Tritenii de Jos (Cluj County), and Craiova (Dolj County). Other churches are threatened with demolition in Ungheeni (Mures County) and Urca (Cluj County). The church of a famous Greek Catholic Monastery of Nicula (Cluj County) was in a similar situation, but following inter-

national and domestic pressure, the Orthodox Church gave up demolishing it. Following increasing tensions in some localities, the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations called and mediated a meeting of the two churches on April 5, 2002. The Minister of Culture announced at the meeting the Government's intention to help the Greek Catholic Church build 50 wooden churches, a solution that does not fully satisfy Greek Catholic Church claims. No such church has been built during the period covered by this report.

In its two meetings in June, the national commission for the restitution of religious property according to Law 501/2002 decided to return 4 of the 2,207 reclaimed buildings to the Greek Catholic Church.

In February 2002, the Orthodox Patriarch in a letter to the Minister of Justice described court rulings in favor of the Greek Catholic Church as "illegal" and "abusive" and stated that decisions on such cases should be made only by the joint Orthodox-Greek Catholic committee. The Minister of Justice distributed the letter to all Courts of Appeal and asked for its careful consideration.

In October 2002, Greek Catholic believers from the country and all over the world addressed a Memorandum to the President, Premier and other state authorities, complaining about discrimination against their Church and calling for the restitution of the Greek Catholic churches and other assets confiscated by the Communist rule. The authorities did not react in any way to this Memorandum.

The historical Hungarian churches, including the Roman Catholic as well as the Protestant churches (Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian), have received a small number of their properties back from the Government. Churches from these denominations were closed but not seized by the Communist regimes. However, the Communist regime confiscated many of these groups' secular properties, which still are used for public schools, museums, libraries, post offices, and student dormitories.

Approximately 80 percent of the buildings confiscated from the Hungarian churches are used "in public interest." Of the 1,630 buildings confiscated by the Communist regime from the Hungarian churches, only 33 were restituted by government decrees between 1996 and 2000. The Hungarian Churches registered 27 of them in the official real estate book. Of these, they could get actual possession of less than 20 buildings. Restitution of the remainder has been delayed due to lawsuits or opposition from current possessors. For example, restitution under Decree 13 of 1998 of the Batthyanaeum Library (which had belonged to the Roman Catholic Church) has been delayed by lawsuits. The situation of the Roman-Catholic Bishop's Palace in Oradea was similar until June when—according to a protocol between the Museum, its current user, and the Roman-Catholic Bishopric—it was partially restituted to its rightful owner. The Minister of Culture and Religious Denominations has stated that he is opposed to their restitution, irrespective of the court rulings on these lawsuits. The national commission for religious property restitution according to Law 501/2002 decided in June to reconstitute 43 of the 1,450 reclaimed buildings to the Hungarian Churches.

The Jewish community has received 42 buildings by government decree. Of these the community has taken actual partial or full possession of 27 buildings. The community has been able to reclaim land only in Iasi, where it received 15 pieces of land (of former synagogues and schools) between 1999 and 2000.

Another problem with restitution is often a simple refusal by the occupant to return a property or pay rent for occupancy. The nominal owner still can be held liable for payment of property taxes in such cases. The Reformed College in Cluj, returned to the Reformed Church by government decree in 1999, had to pay property taxes without receiving any rent from its user, Gheorghe Sincai High School. The building was eventually partially returned to the Reformed Church in December 2002.

According to Law 1 of 2000, religious denominations are entitled to claim between 25 to 250 acres of farmland (depending on the type of religious unit—parish, eparchy, bishopric), and up to 75 acres of forestland from properties seized by the Communists. This is the first law that establishes a systematic procedure for churches to claim land. The enforcement of this law has been slow, largely due to Government desires to further amend the law. This process was completed in 2002 and the amendments do not affect restitution to religious denominations.

The Hungarian churches repeatedly have expressed dissatisfaction with the Government's failure to allow by law the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the State.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect to Religious Freedom

In May the Government granted religion status to a religious group, Jehovah's Witnesses for the first time after the fall of Communism, following international, in particular U.S. pressure in this regard. Although a major breakthrough, this particular case does not solve the general problem of recognition, since there is not a clear procedure in this respect.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups. The Orthodox Patriarch Teoctist visited the Vatican in October 2002.

However, the Romanian Orthodox Church repeatedly has criticized strongly the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church has repeatedly described as "sects." There is no law against proselytizing, or clear understanding of what activities constitute proselytizing. Proselytizing that involves denigrating established churches is perceived as provocative. This has led to conflicts in some cases. The press reported several cases in which adherents of minority religions were prevented by others from practicing their faith, and local law enforcement authorities did not protect them. The "New Right" (Noua Dreapta) organization (a small, right-extreme group with nationalistic, xenophobic views) has repeatedly harassed verbally and sometimes physically the Mormons in several cities around the country. In May two individuals verbally attacked two Mormon missionaries in Bucharest, shouting Noua Dreapta slogans and apparently trying to instigate a physical fight. Noua Dreapta protests against Mormons repeatedly occurred in Iasi. In 2001 Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) regarding the sentencing of six of its members from Mizil to pay fines on charges of insult and assault in a trial initiated by persons linked with the Orthodox Church in 2000. The ECHR's decision was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

The centuries-long domination of the Orthodox Church, and its status as the majority religion, has resulted in the Orthodox Church's reluctance (in particular at the local level and with the support of low-level officials) to accept the existence of other religions. Consequently, actions by other religious groups to attract members are perceived by the Orthodox Church as attempts to diminish the number of its members. Due to its substantial influence, few politicians dare to sponsor bills and measures that would oppose the Orthodox Church. According to minority religious groups, the population is receptive to minority Christian confessions, and local officials in many cases tend to be tolerant but often are pressured and intimidated by the Orthodox clergy. Minority religious groups allege that the Orthodox clergy have provoked isolated mob incidents. The Adventist Church reported such incidents in Jelna (Botosani County) and Breb (Maramures County).

Members of Jehovah's Witnesses complain that the number of cases in which their ministers have been abused verbally and physically by persons incited by Orthodox priests (who often took an active part in these actions) increased over the period covered by the report. Such cases were reported in Clinceni (Ilfov County), Popesti-Leodeni (Ilfov County), Sebes (Alba County), and Stolniceni-Pragescu (Iasi County). The police were cooperative in Deveselu (Olt County) and protected the Jehovah's Witness during possible incidents in Pielesti (Dolj County). In Targusoru (Constanta County), Budesti (Bistrita-Nasaud County), Slanic (Prahova County), and Slatioara (Olt County), the police either did not intervene in Orthodox priests-Jehovah's Witnesses incidents or, under the influence of Orthodox priests, had a negative reaction to Jehovah's Witnesses complaints. In Zarnesti (Brasov County), the Orthodox Parish asked Jehovah's Witnesses to stop activity in the locality. Similar incidents with Orthodox priests were reported by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Hlipiceni (Botosani County), Sarata (Olt County), Chirnoieni (Constanta County), and Fieni (Dambovitza County).

An Orthodox priest assaulted a Presbyterian priest with a metal cross in Bucecea (Botosani County) in June. The population and the police took action in favor of the Presbyterian priest.

The Christian Evangelical Church was denied access by the Orthodox priest to bury several deceased members in the cemetery of Mehedinti (Prahova County). The Seventh-day Adventist Church had similar complaints, Orthodox priests forbidding Adventist burials in Cosoveni (Dolj County), and Poieni (Prahova County). In

Cretesti (Vaslui County) and Calinesti-Vasilache (Suceava County), following pressure by the local authorities or Orthodox hierarchies, the burials were eventually allowed. In all of these cases, it is not clear whether public or church cemeteries were the subject of the disputes. In order to avoid such situations, the Adventist Church asked the mayors' offices for land for cemeteries and received positive answers in some cases (Decebal and Dumbrava (Satu Mare County). Orthodox priests and believers obstructed the burial of Greek Catholic believers in Zabrani (Arad County, Bucova, Lupeni, Uricani (Hunedoara County).

Representatives of minority religions credibly complain that only Orthodox priests grant religious assistance in hospitals, children's homes, and shelters for the elderly. Charitable activities carried out by other churches in children's homes and shelters often have been interpreted as proselytizing.

In addition, the dialog between the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic churches has not eliminated disputes at the local level and has led to little real progress in solving the problem of the restitution of the Greek Catholic assets.

The disputes between Greek Catholics and Orthodox believers over church possession have decreased in number during the period covered by this report. In many cases the Greek Catholics decided to build new churches, following lack of progress in obtaining their properties either by dialog with the Orthodox Church or in court. However, tensions continue to exist in localities where the Orthodox Church refused to enforce court rulings ordering alternate service in former Greek Catholic churches (for example, Simand, Siria, Arad County) or restitution of churches to the Greek Catholic Church (Tigvaniul Mare, Caras Severin County), Arad, Arad County. In mid-March 2002, in Ocna Mures (Alba County), the Orthodox priest along with a group of believers occupied by force, at night, with the help of the police, a church restituted by court ruling to the Greek Catholic Church. In December 2002, the Greek Catholic Church took possession of the church in Mihalt, according to a final court ruling. In Prunis (Cluj County), where most of the residents belong to the Greek Catholic Church, tensions continue due to a longstanding lawsuit. The Greek Catholic priest and the believers from Mihalt (Alba County) sponsored a series of protests in Alba Iulia and Bucharest following the Orthodox Church's refusal to return their church and the priest's house. At the Orthodox Church's request, the Greek Catholic Church previously had dropped the lawsuits in this locality. From May to June, the Minister of Culture and Religious Denominations mediated an agreement between the Orthodox and the Uniate Churches in Mihalt, according to which the Orthodox Church will return the land of the former Uniate parish house and the Greek Catholic Church will build a new church with government funding.

In Decea (Alba County), tensions increased in 2001 when the Orthodox priest locked the church so that the Greek Catholics could not use it. In April 2002, the Orthodox Church agreed to give its old church to the Greek Catholics and to use the Greek Catholic one itself. In localities with two churches (one of which had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church) and only one Orthodox priest, priests no longer keep churches locked but hold religious services in turns in both. Such cases are reported in Chinteni, Vima Mare, Singiorzul Nou, Letea, Suciul de Jos).

Between February and April 2002, in Racovita, the local Orthodox priest's refusal to implement Orthodox Archbishop Corneanu's decision to restore a church to the Greek Catholics led to tension. The church has yet to be restored during the period covered by the report.

In Bicsad (Satu Mare County), where the Greek Catholics obtained a government decision restituting a former Greek Catholic monastery, the Greek Catholic Church still could not take possession of the monastery because of the opposition of the local Orthodox clergy. Local authorities have not supported the enforcement of the Government's decision.

In Dumbraveni the Orthodox Church continues to refuse to enforce a previous court ruling to share a local church with the Greek Catholic Church. Short-term prospects for the return of the Greek Catholic church are dim, since restitution is contingent on construction of a new Orthodox church, which is scheduled to take many years.

The fringe press continued to publish anti-Semitic articles. The Legionnaires (also called the Iron Guard, an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi group that existed in the country in the inter-war period) continued to publish books from the inter-war period. Religious services to commemorate legionnaire leaders continue to be held in Orthodox churches.

Anti-Semitic graffiti were written on the walls the Jewish Theater in Bucharest and on downtown buildings in Cluj in October 2002. Perpetrators have not been identified in either case. Thieves broke into the Jewish temple in Vatra Dornei in July 2002. The synagogue in Focsani was desecrated in July 2002. In May one Jewish cemetery was desecrated in Arad. The perpetrators could not be identified, but

are believed to have been local youths, rather than members of an organized anti-Semitic movement.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Embassy also maintains close contact with a broad range of religious groups in the country. Embassy staff, including the human rights officer, political counselor, and the Ambassador, met with religious leaders and government officials who work on religious affairs in Bucharest and in other cities.

In addition, embassy staff members are in frequent contact with numerous NGOs that monitor developments in the country's religious life. U.S. officials have lobbied consistently in government circles for fair treatment on property restitution issues, including religious and communal properties and for non-discriminatory treatment of all religious groups. The Embassy has worked on the development of inter-confessional understanding and broader religious tolerance.

RUSSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on some groups. Although the Constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect this provision.

There was no change in the over-all status of 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 federal agencies and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations," which seriously disadvantages religious groups new to the country, eased during the period covered by this report. However, there were indications that the security services were increasingly treating the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats.

Religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens, although many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is at the heart of what it means to be Russian. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as societal hostility toward Catholics and newer, non-Orthodox, religions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it often is difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and religions new to the country. Leaders in the Russian Orthodox Church have stated publicly their opposition to the presence of Catholics, Protestants, and newer religions in the country.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of approximately 6.5 million square miles and its population is approximately 144 million.

There are no reliable statistics that break down the population by denomination. Available information suggests that slightly more than half of the inhabitants consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians, although the vast majority of those are not regular churchgoers. There are some 16 to 20 million Muslims, constituting approximately 14 percent of the population and forming the largest religious minority. Muslims live predominantly in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, the northern Caucasus, and the Volga region. By most estimates, Protestants constitute the third largest group of believers. An estimated 600,000 to 1 million Jews remain in the country (0.5 percent of the total population) following large-scale emigration over the last 2 decades. Approximately 80 percent of Jews live in Moscow or St. Petersburg. The so-called Jewish Autonomous Oblast, located in the Far East, contains between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews. Buddhism is traditional to three of the country's re-

gions: Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. In some areas, such as Yakutia and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or alongside majority religions.

According to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), there were 21,448 registered religious organizations as of January 1. The figures show an increase of approximately 1,000 registered organizations since 2002 and over 5,000 since 1997. The MOJ recorded the number of registered religious groups as follows: Russian Orthodox Church—11,299 groups, Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church—42, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad—41, True Orthodox Church—52, Russian Orthodox Free Church—18, Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate)—9, Old Believers—288 (divided among 4 separate groups), Roman Catholic—268, Greek Catholic—4, Armenian Apostolic—61, Muslim—3467, Buddhist—218, Jewish—270 (divided among Orthodox and Reform groups), Baptist—1,015, Pentecostal—1,435, Seventh-day Adventist—643, other evangelical and charismatic groups—134, Lutheran—211 (divided among 4 separate groups), Apostolic—83, Methodist—104, Reformist—5, Presbyterian—140, Anglican—1, Jehovah's Witnesses—407, Mennonite—8, Salvation Army—8, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)—47, Unification Church—10, Church of the "Sovereign" Icon of the Mother of God—29, Molokane—29, Dukhobor—1, Church of the Last Covenant—16, Church of Christ—24, Judaizing Christian—2, non-denominational Christian—41, Scientologist—1, Hindu—1, Krishna—97, Baha'i—20, Tantric—3, Taoist—9, Assyrian—2, Sikh—1, Coptic—1, Shamanist—11, Karaites—2, Zoroastrian—1, Spiritual Unity (Tolstoyan)—1, Living Ethic (Rerikhian)—1, pagan—19, other confessions—240.

The number of registered religious organizations does not reflect the entire demography of religious believers. For example, due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register or reregister. An estimated 500 (official estimate) to more than 9,000 (Council of Mufti estimate) Muslim organizations remain unregistered; some reportedly are defunct, but many, according to the council of Muftis, have concluded that they did not require legal status and have postponed applying to register for financial reasons. The registration figures probably also underestimate the number of Pentecostal believers. New Pentecostal organizations are forming rapidly, and unofficial estimates suggest that there are between 1,500 and 2,000 Pentecostal congregations nationwide, many of which remain unregistered despite their efforts. Some religious groups have registered as social organizations because they are unable to register as religious organizations. The Unification Church reports that the drop in registered organizations from 17 last year to 10 this year is an administrative hitch rather than a real decrease. The same may be true for other groups. The Head of the department for registration of religious organizations for the MOJ reported that although there are Quakers' and Christian Scientists' groups in Russia, they are listed as having no registered religious organizations because they chose not to reregister. Contrary, however, to this information, the Quakers administer one registered religious organization in Moscow. According to the law, they are allowed to operate without being reregistered.

In practice, only a small minority of citizens identify strongly with any religion. Many who identify themselves as members of a faith participate in religious life only rarely or not at all. For example, while an estimated 64 percent of respondents to a 2000 Public Opinion Foundation poll identified themselves as members of a particular faith, only 19 percent said that they visited a place of worship more than once or twice a year (many Orthodox believers attend church only on Christmas or Easter). An estimated 11 percent of respondents said that they observed Lent or other fasts. Only 4 percent of respondents stated that they took communion more than once or twice a year (in the Orthodox tradition, taking communion requires personal preparation by fasting, confession, and prayer).

A large number of foreign missionaries operate in the country, many from Protestant denominations.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on some groups. The Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state; however, the Government did not always respect this provision.

The law on freedom of religion was adopted in 1990 by the Russian Federation's Supreme Court and remained the same until a new law was adopted in 1997. The

1990 law declared all religions equal before the law, prohibited government interference in religion, and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Registration of religious groups was not required, but groups could obtain a number of advantages by registering, such as the ability to establish official places of worship or benefit from tax exemptions. The 1990 law helped facilitate a revival of religious activity. In 1997 a supplemental law on religion was passed: The Law on Freedom of Conscience. Although the 1997 law does not recognize a state religion, its preamble identifies Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism as “traditional religions” and recognizes the “special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia’s spirituality and culture.”

Neither the Constitution nor the 1997 law accords explicit privileges or advantages to “traditional religions;” however, many politicians and public figures argue for closer cooperation with them, above all with the Russian Orthodox Church’s Moscow Patriarchate. The Russian Orthodox Church has entered into a number of agreements, some formal, others informal, with government ministries on such matters as guidelines for public education, religious training for military personnel, and law enforcement and customs decisions, giving the Russian Orthodox Church special access to institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, the FSB, and the army.

Many government officials, along with other citizens, equate Russian Orthodoxy with Russian nationhood. This belief appears to have manifested itself in a church-state relationship. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Interior, and other bodies, such as Emergency Situations, Tax, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces under the President. The details of these agreements are far from transparent, but available information indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church appears to receive more favorable treatment than other denominations. Public statements by some government officials and anecdotal evidence from religious minority groups suggest that the Russian Orthodox Church, increasingly since 1999, has enjoyed a status that approaches official. Election campaign teams often include members of the Russian Orthodox clergy. The clergy also frequently plays a special role at official events at both the local and national level. Nonetheless, policymakers remain divided on the State’s proper relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church and other churches. The 1997 law ostensibly targeted so-called “totalitarian sects” or dangerous religious “cults.” The intent of some of the law’s sponsors, however, appears to have been to discriminate against members of foreign and less well-known religions by making it difficult for them to establish religious organizations in the country. For example, many officials in law enforcement and the legislative branches speak of the need to protect the “spiritual security” of the country by discouraging the growth of “sects” and “cults,” usually understood to include Protestant and newer religious movements.

The 1997 law is very complex, with many ambiguous provisions. It creates various categories of religious communities with differing levels of legal status and privileges. Most significantly, the law distinguishes between religious “groups” and “organizations.” A religious “group” is not registered and consequently does not have the legal status of a juridical person; it may not open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals and among the armed forces. It does not enjoy tax benefits or the right to proselytize. Individual members of the group may buy property for the group’s use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In this way, groups theoretically are permitted to rent public spaces and hold services. However, in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encounter significant difficulty in exercising these rights.

The 1997 law provides that a group that has existed for 15 years and has at least 10 Russian members may register as a “local organization.” It acquires the status of a juridical person and thus receives certain legal advantages. A group with three functioning local organizations in different regions may found a “centralized organization.” A centralized organization has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without adhering to the 15-year rule.

In 1999 the Constitutional Court upheld the 15-year provision; however, it declared that the rule did not apply to organizations that were registered before the passage of the 1997 law. For example, the 15-year rule no longer prevented the registration of newly created Jehovah’s Witnesses religious organizations because they were registered at the time of implementation of the 1997 law.

Nonetheless the 1999 ruling does not support the registration of newer denominations unless they were registered before the passage of the 1997 law or affiliate themselves with existing centralized organizations. For example, in August 2001, the Church of Scientology filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights to protest the denial of registration to a chapter in Surgut, Tyumen Oblast. The authorities denied the chapter registration as a social organization, then denied it registration as a non-profit organization, and finally denied it registration as a religious organization based on the 15-year rule.

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations also are required to register with state authorities, though they are barred from conducting services and other religious activity unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices have opened without registering or have been accredited to a registered religious organization.

Under a 1999 amendment to the law, groups that failed to reregister became subject to legal "liquidation," i.e., deprivation of juridical status. By the deadline for registration, December 31, 2000, an estimated 2,095 religious groups were subject to liquidation, and the MOJ reported that by May 2002, approximately 980 of them had been liquidated. The Ministry asserted that most liquidated organizations were defunct, but religious minorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contended that a significant number were active. Complaints of involuntary liquidation have decreased in recent years.

The 1997 law also gives officials the authority to ban religious groups. Unlike liquidation, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits the activities of an entire religious community. As with liquidation, complaints of bans against legitimate groups have been decreasing. Working groups within the Government continued to focus on introducing possible amendments to the controversial 1997 law. Duma Deputy Aleksandr Chuyev is one of several officials who have proposed legislative changes to formally grant special status to the country's "traditional" religious denominations. No new changes were implemented during the period covered by this report. In March, newspapers reported the formation of a religious lobby called "In Support of Traditional Spiritual and Moral Values," with deputies representing the four "traditional" religions in the country (Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism).

On May 15, the Supreme Court reversed its own earlier decision and ruled in favor of a group of Muslim women from Tatarstan who had sought the right to wear headscarves in photos taken for official documents.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities have established consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and to monitor application of the 1997 law. At the national level, groups interact with a special governmental commission on religion, which includes representatives from law enforcement bodies and government ministries. On broader policy questions, religious groups interact with a special department within the Presidential Administration's Directorate for Domestic Policy, entitled the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Organizations. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academics who are specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of both majority and minority faiths.

Discussion continued during the period covered by this report on the efficacy of creating a government ministry or organ for religious affairs. Many religious organizations emphasized that such an institution would be unwelcome if it emulated its Soviet predecessor's repressive activities. Others, including some minority religious groups, believe that such a body could ensure equal treatment for all faiths under the law.

Interest in establishing a government ministry or organ for religious affairs may have been prompted in part by a view held by a number of government officials, particularly in the security services, that foreign religious groups, particularly Muslims, but also Catholics, some Protestant groups, and a number of religious groups relatively new to the country, constituted security threats that required greater monitoring and possibly greater control. In December, accounts of a draft report on religious extremism prepared by a working group under the supervision of Nationalities Minister Vladimir Zorin and Chechen administration head Akhmat Kadyrov appeared in the press. The draft, as leaked to the press, focused primarily on radical Islam and included concerns about a "clash of civilizations" between Christians and Muslims. It also mentioned a sharp increase in religious groups in general, and asserted that their activity constituted a security threat. There was specific mention of Roman Catholics, whose activities were causing "tension," and of Jehovah's Witnesses. The draft report recommended a federal body to manage ethnic and state-religious relations, including stricter sentences for individuals inciting religious, as

well as ethnic and racial hatred. Minister Zorin himself denied that the report had any official status and there was no indication at the end of the period covered by this report that any version of it had received official approval. Nonetheless, it appeared to reflect the types of concerns that prompted government actions in a number of visa and registration cases.

In June, a news service in Bashkortostan reported that the chief federal inspector and the deputy chief of the republic's FSB held a public meeting on security issues. During the meeting, the officials reportedly warned that non-traditional religions are used by foreign organizations to undermine the country's security. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the True Orthodox Church, the New Apostle Church, Aum Shinrikyo, and Satanists were named as dangerous sects. In September, Secretary Rushaylo of the Russian Security Council accused non-traditional religious confessions of acting at times beyond the limits of the law, calling for adequate responses by law enforcement structures.

Contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, provide regional officials with opportunities to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Many observers attribute discriminatory practices to the greater susceptibility of local governments to discriminatory attitudes and lobbying by local majority religions. There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in the public discussion of their religious views, but usually these instances were resolved quickly. President Vladimir Putin's articulated desire for greater centralization of power and strengthening the rule of law has led to some improvements in the area of religious freedom in the regions. The federal Government works through the Procuracy, Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and the courts to force regions to comply with federal law. The Government often is active in preventing or reversing discrimination at the local level.

The country's legal code includes strong hate-crime laws. In addition, an anti-extremism bill was adopted on July 25, with the goal of reducing religious and ethnic intolerance and limiting the activities of ultra-right-wing parties and organizations. The legislation prohibits advocating the superiority of any group based on religion, race, nationality, language, or other attributes in public speech. However, critics charged that the legislation could prompt a dangerous expansion of police power and that the Government had already demonstrated a lack of political will in fulfilling the potential of existing legislation (such as Article 282 of the Criminal Code). Some observers expressed particular concern about the effect of the legislation on religious freedom. In at least one region, Samara, authorities subsequently made use of the legislation to cancel the registration of a Buddhist community and the Church of the Last Covenant and to refuse registration to communities of Scientologists and the Unification Church. In the vast majority of crimes targeting Jewish organizations and property, officials generally ignore the anti-Semitic components of the crimes and prosecute criminals under the much more lenient charge of "hooliganism."

Article 282 of the Criminal Code governs cases of incitement to national, racial, or religious hatred. According to the Procuracy General, as of November 1, 2001, the authorities had opened 37 cases pursuant to Article 282. As of July 1, 2002, according to the statistical department of the Supreme Court, the Procuracy had brought five such cases to court, but none of the accused was convicted. NGO reports indicate that over the course of 2002, the authorities opened 71 such cases in Russian courts and 32 individuals were sentenced. In 1999, there had been only four such cases.

A November "Law on Foreigners," which transferred much of the responsibility for visa affairs from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of the Interior, appears to have disrupted the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers, and possibly contributed to the sharp decrease in the issuance of long-term visas. Though not a universal occurrence or official policy, many religious workers received three-month visas (even if they had previously held visas with one year validity). The curtailed validity has led religious groups to begin shuttling their missionaries in and out of the country every three months. Officials in the Duma, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and MOJ have stated that the changes in visa validity are a result of administrative adjustments due to the new regulations. Some have asserted that the issuance of three-month visas is a temporary situation.

The State does not require religious instruction in schools, although in some regions the Russian Orthodox Church uses public buildings after hours to provide religious instruction to pupils on a voluntary basis. In the spring of 2002, the Pokrov publishing house began issuing 10,000 copies of the pro-Orthodox textbook "Foundations of Orthodox Culture" for use in public schools. The course is optional, but only a small percentage of non-Orthodox parents choose to keep their children out of the course. In some regions, public schools taught the subject for several years before

the introduction of the latest textbook. Disputes over language against non-Orthodox, particularly Jews, continue, though attempts to bring legal suits against the authors and publisher have been unsuccessful. The authors have stated their readiness to delete negative references to Jews in subsequent editions of the textbook.

In January 2002, at the Tenth International Christmas Readings held in the Kremlin, Education Minister Vladimir Filippov cited a 2000 policy document that obliges the Government to “ensure the spirituality and morality of the coming generation.” In the same year, the Ministry of Education addressed a note to heads of educational institutions warning against the penetration of non-traditional religions into the country.

The Constitution mandates the availability of alternative military service to those who refuse to bear arms for religious or other reasons of conscience. The legal foundation for such an alternative came into force on July 25 with the passage of a federal law on alternative civilian service. Length of service was set at 42 months (1.75 times longer than regular military service). Human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service in essence acts as a punishment for those who choose to exercise their religious or moral convictions. The law is scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2004, but human rights activists report that prosecutions for avoiding service have declined already under the influence of the legislation. The head of the draft board in Surgut reports that conscripts increasingly refuse to go into military service because of their convictions, and that actual call-ups are being delayed until the law comes into force. The Government also passed regulations on January 23 granting draft postponement to members of the clergy. The regulations established a quota of 300 members of the clergy in 2002, to be distributed among different religious organizations by the Commission on Religious Associations of the Government of the Russian Federation.

The authorities permit Orthodox chapels and priests on army bases. They give some Protestant groups access to military facilities on a more limited basis; however, Islamic services are banned, and Muslim conscripts are not given alternatives to pork-based meals or time to say daily prayers.

The office of federal Human Rights Ombudsman Oleg Mironov contains a department dedicated to religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints from individuals and groups about infringements of religious freedom. Mironov has recommended changes to bring the country's legislation into accordance with international standards and the Constitution. He has also criticized local laws, such as legislation passed in Belgorod restricting the activities of local missionaries, and attempted to bring them into line with federal standards. In some regions there also are local human rights ombudsmen with a mandate to address religious freedom issues.

Other avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities also exist. The administrative structures of at least some of the offices of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential District Representatives (polpreds) include offices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials responsible for acting as a liaison with religious organizations; however, it is at the regional and municipal levels that religious minorities often encounter the greatest problems.

The Russian Academy of State Service works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, to train regional and municipal officials in implementing the law properly. The academy opens up many of its conferences to international audiences.

In 2001 the Government adopted a tolerance program with a yearly allotment of \$806,452 USD (25 million rubles) to cover the period 2001–2005. The original plan called for a large number of interagency measures, such as the review of federal and regional legislation on extremism, mandatory training for public officials on how to promote ethnic and religious tolerance, and new educational materials for use in public educational institutions. An interagency commission headed by the Ministry of Education guides the plan, which began in 2001 and focused mainly on establishing monitoring mechanisms and pilot projects on college campuses. During this period, provincial authorities launched 170 study programs and developed 200 educational guides in such locations as the Republic of Kareliya and Udmurtiya, and Rostov and Tomsk Oblasts. Implementation of the plan was sporadic. Nevertheless, at least one NGO was able to work in parallel with the program (in 2001–2002), participating in training law enforcement and other government officials (both local and federal) in promoting tolerance. The Saint Petersburg NGO Harold and Selma Light Center, in conjunction with a foreign-based NGO, conducted successful programs in Petrozavodsk, Ryazan, and Kazan. In February 2003, the Ministry of Education announced a competition for higher education institutions to develop research

projects on tolerance. Also in Moscow, city authorities reportedly made an allotment to local tolerance initiatives as part of the federal program.

Officials under the President of Kalmykia met with the republic's head Buddhist and Orthodox bishop on April 1 to discuss concerns about alternative schools of Buddhism and the increasing numbers of Adventists, Baptists, and Pentecostals in the republic. Since 1993, officials have encouraged a revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia, along with state subsidies for building Buddhist temples and training monks. Despite this support, officials state that Buddhism is not the state religion in Kalmykia.

The local government in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the strongest Islamic areas of Russia, continued to encourage a Tatar cultural and religious revival but avoided instituting confrontational religious policies. Since the breakup of the USSR, the Tatarstan government has funded the construction of some 1,000 mosques and several dozen Islamic schools.

The regions of Kabardino-Balkariya and Dagestan have laws banning extremist religious activities, described as "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny Muslim groups registration.

On June 25, President Putin stated publicly that secular authorities would do everything in their power to help improve relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican. Some of the country's highest-level officials attended the Orthodox Christmas service at Christ the Savior Cathedral.

The President, who has openly spoken of his belief in God, acknowledged Orthodox Easter, Rosh Hashanah, Ramadan, and the Buddhist New Year with greetings to representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities, respectively. Orthodox Christmas, January 7, is observed as a national holiday.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Critics continue to identify several aspects of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience as providing a basis for actions that restrict religious freedom. They criticize in particular the provisions allowing the State to ban religious organizations, requiring organizations to reregister, and establishing procedures for their liquidation. Critics also cite provisions that not only limit the rights of religious "groups," but also require that religious groups exist for 15 years before they can qualify for "organization" status. Although the situation is somewhat better for groups that were registered before 1997, groups new to the country are hindered in their ability to practice their faith. The federal Government has attempted to apply the 1997 law liberally and critics direct most of their allegations of restrictive practices at local officials. Implementation of the 1997 law varies widely in the regions, depending on the attitude of local offices of the Ministry of Justice (responsible for registration, liquidation, and bans).

Under the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience, the Government may seek to ban a religious organization deemed a threat to society. Unlike liquidation, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits the activities of an entire religious community. Banning proceedings require judicial review. The Procuracy of Moscow's Northern Circuit continued its efforts to ban the local organization of Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that it was a threat to society, a basis for banning a religious organization under the 1997 law. The initial suit was dismissed in February 2001, but a retrial opened at the higher Golovinskiy Municipal Court in October 2001. On May 22, the retrial was adjourned pending the completion of an expert study to assess physiological and linguistic aspects of Jehovah's Witness teachings. This was the fourth expert study ordered in the ongoing trial. A previous expert study, ordered in April 2002, delayed the court case for ten months. Human rights organizations, including the Council of Europe's Monitoring Committee, protested the extraordinary length of the trial and called for its resolution. City officials cited the trial as justification for withholding registration. Lawyers for the Jehovah's Witnesses organization appealed to the European Court for Human Rights, which in turn questioned the Government and requested a response by September 16, 2003. The Moscow community remains operational, although it experienced continuing difficulties in finding venues for religious services.

The 1997 law required all religious organizations previously registered under the more liberal 1990 law to reregister by December 31, 2000. In practice this process, which involves simultaneous registration at both the federal and local levels, requires considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded domestic religious organizations began to reregister soon after publication of the 1997 regulations. However, some Pentecostal congregations refused to register out of philosophical conviction, and according to spokespersons for the country's two

most prominent muftis, some Muslim groups decided that they would not benefit from reregistering.

Local officials, reportedly sometimes influenced by close relations with local Russian Orthodox Church authorities, either refused outright to register groups or created prohibitive obstacles to registration. A lack of specific guidelines to accompany the 1997 law and the shortage of knowledgeable local officials contributed to the problem. There are indications that the Procurator General encouraged local prosecutors to challenge the registration of some non-traditional religious groups.

According to spokespersons, authorities permitted registration of Jehovah's Witnesses in 399 communities, but problems with registration continue in several communities. On December 12, 2000, the Moscow Community of Jehovah's Witnesses filed with the Justice Department, its fifth and final application for re-registration. When the application was dismissed on January 12, 2001, the Jehovah's Witnesses filed claims to secure re-registration in the courts of the City of Moscow. Twice during the period covered by this report the Moscow City Court denied registration applications by Jehovah's Witnesses, most recently on February 20. The trials for the cases continued in the Presnensky, Kuzminskiy, and Butyrskiy District Courts. In the Presnensky Court, the civil chamber of the Moscow City Court dismissed the appeal on December 2. The Kuzminsky District Court ruled the request for supervisory review must be re-filed under a new procedure, which the attorneys did on April 25, and were still awaiting word. In the Butyrskiy District Court, the judge denied leave for a supervisory review on March 3. On May 30, the attorneys for the Jehovah's Witnesses filed a request with Moscow City Court Chairman Yegorova seeking reconsideration of the judge's ruling (this is prerequisite to any further supervisory appeal in the Russian Supreme Court). The Jehovah's Witnesses organization reports Witnesses have been denied registration in Tver and in Cheboksary, a city in Chuvashiya. In November, a court in Chelyabinsk ruled that the authorities' refusal to register the group was illegal, allowing the group to register successfully on April 7.

The Mormons have succeeded in registering more than 45 local religious organizations as of June 30; however, in several regions local officials impeded registration. For example, the Mormons have attempted unsuccessfully to register a local religious organization in Kazan, Tatarstan, since 1998. The local Department of Justice in Chelyabinsk continues to reject the local Mormons' registration application, alleging that Mormon activities are incompatible with federal law. The Mormons have been denied registration in Ryazan and Shakhtiy, but officials registered them in Khabarovsk and Nakhodka.

Although media, NGO reports, and government officials had reported that many local Muslim religious organizations were unable to reregister before the December 31, 2000 deadline, spokespersons for the country's two most prominent muftis stated that most Muslim religious organizations that wanted to register were able to do so. In the remaining cases, procedural irregularities and mutual accusations of "Wahhabism" by the two principal Muslim groups appear to have hindered reregistration efforts by Muslim organizations. The term "Wahhabi," referring to a branch of Sunni Islam, has become pejorative because of persistent allegations that "Wahhabism" was to blame for terrorist attacks linked to the war in Chechnya.

In Samara, authorities made use of anti-extremism legislation passed in July to cancel the registration of a Buddhist community and the Church of the Last Covenant. Communities of Scientologists and the Unification Church also were refused registration in Samara because of the legislation.

An amendment to the 1997 law requires the MOJ to seek the liquidation of groups that fail to register. In February 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Moscow City Court had acted improperly in liquidating the local branch of the Salvation Army, since that group had made repeated and timely attempts to reregister under the 1997 law. The Taganskiy District Court subsequently issued a decision against liquidation of the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army, which was supported in a decision by the Moscow City Court on March 16. Despite these favorable rulings, the MDJ had not reregistered the organization by the end of the period covered by this report. The Moscow organization continues to operate on a limited basis, but has experienced difficulties in purchasing a meeting space.

The Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology has not been permitted by the Moscow authorities to reregister and was threatened with liquidation. The Scientologists filed a suit with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) against the liquidation order and has continued to avoid liquidation. The Scientologists countered the MDJ contention that the Church had failed to reregister by the deadline by citing the 2002 Constitutional Court ruling in favor of the Salvation Army, stating that the group had tried repeatedly to re-register, and, therefore, could not be liquidated. Despite the court ruling against liquidation, local

authorities denied registration to the St. Petersburg branch of the Church of Scientology four times during the period covered by this report. Local authorities also continued to impede the operation of Scientology centers in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities, but the Supreme Court returned for retrial a liquidation order against the Khabarovsk Dianetics Center filed by the local Department of Justice which the Church of Scientology had lost on appeal. In a related case, the Director of the Khabarovsk Dianetics Center was convicted on criminal charges of the illegal practice of medicine and education. She lost on appeal and was given a suspended sentence of 6 years. Since she had been found guilty, the public prosecutor of the city of Khabarovsk filed a suit for liquidation of the Center, as the Center was allegedly involved in illegal activity. The statement of claim for liquidation was based entirely on expert opinions from criminal cases, i.e. imputing medical and educational activities to the Center. On September 25, 2002, the court approved the claim for liquidation of the Dianetics Center, and the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation upheld the judgment of the trial court. Local media attention included references to "totalitarian sects" in their coverage. The Scientologists also have several groups that are registered as social organizations because they were unable to register them as religious organizations.

On March 21, a regional court in Primorskiy Kray approved the liquidation of the "Faith in Action" Bible College in Vladivostok. The prosecutor's office accused the college of conducting religious education without a license, though lawyers for the school argued there was no basis to the accusations as long as the school did not issue diplomas or certificates. Administrators at the school reported burdensome regulatory demands by fire and sanitation officials. On May 20, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling in favor of liquidation.

On January 28, a regional court in Kostroma Oblast dropped charges of brainwashing against the Family of God Pentecostal community and dismissed an order for liquidation that had been ongoing since 2000. Despite the resolution of the court case, officials continue to make frequent visits to the community and request information about its activities and finances. The community has been forced to change location three times since 2002. Articles attacking the church appeared periodically in the local press during the period covered by this report.

While many of the restrictions on religious freedom are associated with the 1997 law, there were other unrelated restrictions enacted at the local level.

Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities. Mormons encountered difficulty obtaining permission to build and then occupy an assembly hall in Volgograd. In March, a 300-strong unregistered Baptist community was unexpectedly informed they could no longer rent premises at a public library in Moscow where they have met for the last six years.

A hearing was scheduled for August on the right of Jehovah's Witnesses in Yuzhno Sakhalinsk to make use of a new worship hall they had constructed. On December 3, 2002, a city court cancelled the mayor's permit authorizing their use of the land; on April 8, a higher court reversed the decision, but the mayor's office then preempted the decision by canceling its original permit. In a separate attempt to prevent occupation of the building, local citizens in Yuzhno Sakhalinsk initiated a law suit asking the city not to register the Jehovah's Witnesses' property title. The court dismissed the case on June 24, but the authorities appealed to a higher court. In the course of these developments, the Jehovah's Witnesses organization was fined approximately \$645(19,855 rubles) for holding meetings in the building without the mayor's permit. The authorities also cut off electricity to the building temporarily. The polemic reportedly has attracted extensive hostile media attention and prompted local citizens to establish an "anti-cult" social organization.

In Khabarovsk, Jehovah's Witnesses purchased a building, but the authorities refused to register the title despite three court orders. Lawyers continue to challenge the local Department of Justice's refusal to register the title, but no date has been set for the latest hearing. The building is in danger of being sold to a different buyer.

The Moscow city authorities gave Hare Krishna leaders a deadline of September to vacate their premises. The Krishnaites possess a 2.5-acre empty lot but have not been given permission to rent temporary quarters until they can build a new center. Krishnaites have been renting a camp outside of Moscow for the past ten years that houses a number of families and a temple. Officials demanded that the community buy the property and reportedly posted guards at the camp to review the comings and goings of its residents.

A "temporary ban" remains in effect on construction of a Catholic Church in Pskov. City authorities reportedly imposed the ban after objections by the archbishop of the local Russian Orthodox Church. Opponents of the church's construc-

tion argued that the church was too large, infringing on the city's historic center, and that the belfry was too prominent. The local parish had submitted blueprints for the church and received the permits required by law before beginning construction. Permission for construction to go forward was granted on September 17, 2002, but construction halted again in April. Local officials said that the church leadership had yet to provide required documentation to permit construction to resume and that once this obstacle was overcome they were confident that the project would go forward. Catholics also have been unable to obtain final approval from the mayor's office for construction of a church in the historical center of Yaroslavl. The land adjoins a building that housed a pre-Revolutionary Catholic chapel. In July, approval was withheld unexpectedly.

The Russian Orthodox Church in some cases continues to enjoy a close ceremonial relationship with government officials. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this close church-state relationship sometimes extends beyond purely ceremonial roles. For example, in early 2002, the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) received Patriarch Aleksiy at the Service's Lubyanka headquarters, where the prelate blessed a church that had been restored. In public statements on that occasion, both figures spoke of the need to defend the country's spiritual security against "sects" and "cults."

Tensions between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican, which increased during the reporting period, often involved the Government of Russia. In 2002, after the Russian Orthodox Church vehemently protested the decision by the Vatican to upgrade its four existing apostolic administrations to dioceses, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling upon the Vatican to refrain from such a move and "to settle the matter with the Russian Orthodox Church." The Russian Orthodox Church denied involvement in the subsequent cancellation of the visas of five Catholic priests, including one bishop, but heatedly defended the cancellations as a state prerogative and an appropriate response to Catholic "encroachment." In April 2002, Duma deputy Viktor Alksnis submitted a draft resolution calling upon the President to direct the Justice Ministry and its local departments to pursue the legal ban of the Catholic Church's four dioceses. The following month, the Duma failed to pass the resolution with the necessary 226 votes, with 169 lawmakers voting in favor, 37 against, and 4 abstaining.

Human rights groups and religious minority groups have criticized the Procurator General for encouraging legal action against some minority religions and for giving an imprimatur of authority to materials that are biased against Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and others. The FSB, the Procurator, and other official agencies have conducted campaigns of harassment against Catholics, some Protestant groups, and newer religious movements. Churches faced investigations for purported criminal activity, landlords were pressured to renege on contracts, and in some cases the security services are thought to have influenced the MOJ to reject registration applications. For example, in March 2002, Pastor Martinez of the Kingdom of God church in Moscow reported that two persons dressed as police officers and ten in civilian clothing broke down the doors of the church, disrupting a worship service. They conducted a documents check and seized a medicine cabinet in what they described as a search for narcotics. The President of the Mormon organization in the Russian Far East reported several instances in which law enforcement officials visited Church meetings and asked questions about the activities of missionaries.

In September, the MOJ registered a new political party, the National Power Party of Russia (NDPR), which is openly anti-Semitic. The party's co-chairman, Boris Mironov, was ousted from his government post of press minister in 1994 for making anti-Semitic comments, and the party's senior executive, Viktor Korchagin, has been prosecuted repeatedly for kindling nationalist discord. On May 20, the MOJ revoked the party's registration based on a technicality. More mainstream politicians also made anti-Semitic comments in the press, such as Duma Deputy and leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation Gennadiy Zyuganov. Communist Duma deputy Vasilii Shandybin has often made derogatory public references to Jews. Krasnodar Governor Aleksandr Tkachev claimed in public that there was a Zionist plot in his province, although very few Jews live there (in spite of this statement, he has also promised to help the Jewish community with their efforts to build a synagogue in Krasnodar). Anti-Semitic themes also figure in local election campaigns. In the summer of 2002, in Dzerzhinsk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Vladimir Briker faced a tide of anti-Semitic propaganda in the final week of a tight race for mayor.

Pentecostal representatives reported that the head of the Khabarovsk administration's Department of Religion continued to engage in a campaign of harassment, hindering the church's registration efforts and imposing extensive bureaucratic requirements on visiting missionaries. Harassment by officials included an organized

roundtable to discuss the negative effects of the religion. In addition, the local church was vandalized. The Victory Chapel congregation, which is affiliated with a centrally registered Pentecostal organization, is among the Protestant churches denied registration in the region. The local Russian Orthodox bishop submitted comments to an article in the Telemir newspaper in March identifying Baptists, Adventists, and Pentecostals as sects and urging the authorities to clean Sakhalin of the influence of sects. The main article also suggested that the Victory Chapel engaged in destructive practices such as hypnotism, estranging members from their families, and plundering members' finances.

In May, official attention to the Moscow-based Buddhist community "Rinchen Ling" increased. According to the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, representatives of security, tax, and passport control services carried out frequent visits to a location where the community was preparing for an annual summer seminar. Earlier in the year, representatives from the city architect's office and the fire and sanitation services also visited the camp. From May 20 into the month of June, electric power to the camp was switched off. In previous years, the summer seminar had not attracted the attention of authorities.

In 2001, local legislators in the Belgorod region passed a law restricting missionary activity, including the use of venues in which religious meetings may be held. Foreigners visiting the region are forbidden to engage in missionary activity or to preach unless specifically allowed to do so according to their visas (some groups reportedly sent religious workers on business or tourist visas in order not to alert the authorities to their activities). In December 2001, the Supreme Court rejected the Belgorod local procurator's challenge to the law. In August 2001, the Belgorod regional court ruled to strike one article of the law that stated that groups receiving repeated violations would be banned. No information was available concerning any attempts to enforce this law by the end of the period covered by this report.

A Catholic parish in Magadan, run by Father Michael Shields, came under continued threat of liquidation by local authorities. In March 2002, Father Shields won his court case that challenged the legality of his nomination as priest of the local Catholic parish on the grounds that he is a foreign citizen, and his parish avoided liquidation, but at the end of the reporting period, the new Magadan cathedral remained unconsecrated in symbolic recognition of Bishop Mazur's absence, despite the arrival of the new Bishop, Kirill Klimovich.

Foreign religious workers without residency permits typically must go abroad once a year to renew their visas; some receive multiple-entry visas or are able to extend their stays. Since the enactment of a new "Law on Foreigners" and subsequent amendments starting in November, religious workers report difficulty obtaining visas with terms longer than three months. The authorities denied Catholic priest Bronislaw Czaplicki, who had worked in the country for eleven years, an extension of his residency permit in February. He returned to St. Petersburg in May after being issued a three-month visa.

Some religious personnel experienced visa and customs difficulties while entering or leaving the country. It is so difficult to get a religious visa that some foreign workers feel they have little choice but to conceal the true purpose of their visit. That, in turn, leaves them open to accusations that they have misrepresented the purpose of their travel and therefore do not deserve another visa. Others had difficulties registering their visas with the local authorities, as required by law. For example, in March 2002, Riga-based Pentecostal pastor Aleksey Ledyayev flew to Moscow to address a conference of religious ministers; however, the authorities detained him at the airport for an estimated 9 to 11 hours before returning him to Riga. Authorities reportedly left Ledyayev's Russian visa in his Latvian passport without canceling it but offered no explanation for their actions. In the fall of 2002, a court in Khabarovsk attempted to deport two Mormon missionaries for failing to register their visas. Authorities did not always permit Mormon missionaries in Novgorod and Pskov to register their visas. In March, Moscow officials refused to register the visas of four foreign missionaries for Jehovah's Witnesses with the local police, citing the ongoing banning trial. The four eventually relocated to other cities within the country.

In addition, authorities either deported or denied entry to several religious workers with valid visas during the period covered by this report. The Keston News Service estimated that over the course of 2002, the Government acted to prevent access to the country to 19 religious workers by revoking the visas of 7 religious workers, denying visas to 8 others, and deporting 4 more.

In April 2002, two Roman Catholic religious workers, Bishop Jerzy Mazur of the diocese in Irkutsk, a Polish citizen, and Father Stefano Caprio, a priest in Vladimir, an Italian citizen, discovered while traveling abroad that the authorities had de-

clared them *personae non gratae* and canceled their visas. Bishop Mazur is one of only four bishops for Russia. Three more priests, Fathers Krajnak, Wisniewski, and Mackiewicz, a Slovak, and two Poles, respectively, were denied entry in the fall of 2002. According to officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the priests were expelled on security grounds (article 27, part 1 of the Federal Law on Entry and Exit of the Territory of the Russian Federation). By the end of the reporting period, none of the five priests has been permitted back in the country. An estimated 85 percent of Catholic clergy in Russia are foreigners. Since the country's only Catholic seminary, in St. Petersburg, graduated its first class only in 2000, observers assert that it may take more than a decade for substantial numbers of native priests to be available to service the Catholic community. A spokesperson for Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz' office reports that other priests received visas throughout the winter and spring ranging in validity from three to twelve months. Celibate Catholic clergy do not have the option to gain permanent residency or citizenship on the basis of marriage to Russian citizens, unlike other religious workers who have done so.

The Government continues to deny a visa to the Dalai Lama. In September 2001, according to an Interfax news agency report, President Putin promised the Kalmyk President that he would order the Foreign Ministry to review its denial of a visa to the Tibetan holy man. Despite these assurances, the Lama again was refused a visa in early September 2002. Scores of Buddhists were reportedly detained and fined for holding unsanctioned protests outside the Foreign Ministry in August and September. A representative of the Moscow Buddhist community reported that he plans to reapply for the Dalai Lama's visa in the near future. The Dalai Lama last visited the country in 1991.

Mormons had difficulty securing visas for some of their foreign missionaries, particularly with the Vladivostok branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In some cases, Mormons resorted to applying for tourist rather than religious visas. Tourist visas are easier to obtain but create problems for the missionaries when they attempt to register their visas in the country. The Mormons were unable to procure residency permits for missionaries in any of the regions except Moscow and Samara. Although they are being issued multiple-entry visas, the length varies (3 months to 1 year) from region to region. Church lawyers presume that officials in some areas, such as Chelyabinsk, have prevented foreign religious workers from registering in order to restrict foreign proselytizers. However, the authorities have never officially accused the Mormon missionaries of proselytism.

Individuals who have been denied visas continually include Dan Pollard of the Vanino Baptist Church in Khabarovsk region, whose visa application was rejected first in 1999 despite his acquittal on earlier tax and customs charges. A judge in Khabarovsk issued an order in July 2002 clearing Pollard of any obstacles to entering the country, but Khabarovsk officials have not complied. Charles Landreth of the Church of Christ in Volgograd was refused a visa in the fall of 1999 amid accusations in the Volgograd press of spying. Meetings with local Volgograd officials in January revealed that Landreth had been denied entry for traveling on an invalid visa, even though the Russian Consulate in San Francisco had issued his religious visa.

In addition to Catholic Bishop Jerzy Mazur, who was denied reentry on security grounds, other instances of denial include Patrick Nolan, a member of the Unification Church, who was denied entry on June 2, 2002. After mounting a legal challenge to the expulsion, a subsequent court case revealed that the security services considered Nolan's activities a threat to the nation. Nolan lost both the court case on April 22 and an appeal before the Supreme Court on June 19. Swedish Evangelical Christian Leo Martensson, based in Krasnodar, was denied entry on September 10 despite his nine-year residence in the country. Larry Little of the Church of Christ in Komi has not been able to return to Russia since his religious visa was seized and cancelled in August 2001. No official reason for the cancellation has ever been given. Victor Barousse, a Christian working for the Global Strategy Missions Association in Irkutsk, had worked nine years in the country when he was declared a threat to state security in 2002 and prohibited from reentering. Randolph Marshall, a Protestant missionary working in Yaroslavl with the OMS Christian organization, was refused reentry in November 2002. Other examples continue to occur.

News service reports indicated that five missionaries who had been taking an active part in the work of the Christian Church in Kostroma were denied Russian visas to reenter in July. Jeff and Susan Wollman and Roland and Virginia Cook were among them. The Wollmans learned about their visa reentry denial in June 2002. On July 19, Vladimir Denisichev, President of the Association of the Evangelical Churches, addressed a request to the Consular Services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a request for visas for the Wollmans and the Cooks and received the response that the two families were denied visas for state security rea-

sons. On August 1, after the Wollmans' attempt to apply for a visa through the Kostroma regional department dealing with visas and registration issues, the Russian Embassy in Washington again denied their visas. On September 25, the Wollmans addressed Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov with a letter asking for an explanation why they were denied their visas. American preacher Bill Northon also was denied reentry under article 27. Northon was invited to Kostroma by "The Family of God" Pentecostal Church, but was denied a visa on three different occasions, starting in summer 2002, for the same state security reason. According to the church's pastor Andery Danilov, Bill Northon used to come to Russia twice a year.

The restitution of religious property seized by the Communist Government remains an issue. According to the Presidential Administration, since a 1993 decree on property restitution went into effect, 4,000 buildings have been returned to religious groups (of which approximately 3,500 were returned to the Russian Orthodox Church). 15,000 religious articles, including icons, torahs, and other items, also were returned. Most properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, have been returned as well, although some in the Jewish community assert that only a small portion of the total properties confiscated under Soviet rule have been returned. The Jewish community is seeking the return of a number of synagogues, religious scrolls, and cultural and religious artifacts, such as the Schneerson book collection (a revered collection of the Chabad Lubavitch).

A news service reported on June 24 that authorities in Krasnodar officially refused to return a city synagogue confiscated in 1936, arguing that there were no alternative locations to house the occupants (a youth radio school). There were no functioning synagogues in Krasnodar Kray at the end of the period covered by this report. In May, Krasnodar officials refused a request by the Jewish community to stop construction of a sports complex that threatened to destroy a Jewish cemetery. Muslims in Krasnodar attempted unsuccessfully to gain authorization from the mayor's office to build a new mosque in the city of Sochi. They accuse the mayor and governor of Krasnodar of creating official barriers to construction. Catholics continue to pursue legal avenues towards restoration of the Saint Peter and Saint Paul cathedral in Moscow. The Russian Orthodox Church appears to have had greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups.

On May 15, the Russian Supreme Court, overturning its own decision of earlier in the year, ruled that Muslim women will be allowed to wear headscarves for passport and other official photographs. In the case, which originated in the majority-Muslim republic of Tatarstan, the plaintiffs had argued that the scarves were required by their religion. Muslim groups welcomed the ruling.

While most conscripts looking for exemptions from military service sought medical or student exemptions, the courts provided relief to others on the grounds of their religious convictions. Jehovah's Witnesses report 70 court cases where conscripts defended their rights not to serve in the military. Out of these 70 cases, 29 were adjudicated in favor of the objector, 17 against, and 23 cases were still ongoing. Also, there were 10 (from among these 70 cases) criminal cases initiated against Jehovah's Witnesses, who refuse military service. Of these, two were convicted, five were acquitted, and three cases are still ongoing. In the region of Kirov, there were several cases in which conscripts were denied the right to alternative service. Seven lost their court cases during the fall draft season, but one was allowed to avoid regular military service.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice represented several conscripts seeking religious waivers. On April 19, 2002, the Surazhskiy regional court in Bryansk Oblast upheld the complaint of evangelical Sergey Dorokhoviy against the local draft board. Dorokhoviy, who asserts that he is unwilling to perform his military service on the grounds of his religious convictions, had protested against the local draft board's decision to deny his request for alternative service, arguing that no law provided for such an exemption. Before the April 19 ruling, lower courts had twice upheld the draft board's decision. On December 25, 2001, the deputy chair of the Supreme Court lodged a protest with the presidium of the Bryansk Oblast court, which then ordered a retrial of Dorokhoviy's case in a lower court.

On June 19, Muslim Arslan Khasanov was sentenced to two years in prison for evasion of military service. Khasanov, the son of a Mednogorsk mullah, was charged in March 2002 after he refused to perform his military service on moral grounds arising from his opposition to the use of force against Muslims in Chechnya.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There is evidence that terrorist attacks related to the Chechen conflict have prompted official action against the general Muslim population. On June 6, in a joint operation, representatives of the security services and the Ministry of the Interior carried out a raid on 121 Muslim terrorist suspects, 55 of whom were suspected

members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an international Islamic group that was banned in the country in February. Officials freed most of the suspects the following day; criminal proceedings, on weapons charges, were opened against only two of the suspects. Human rights activists accused the Government of staging the raid as a propaganda ploy. Muslim leaders have claimed that various government bodies use the unsubstantiated claims of extremist and violent Islamic groups in an attempt to isolate Muslims from the greater community and lessen their political leverage.

The Bigotry Monitor reported on March 7 that on February 25, in Moscow, police beat “Ekho-TV” reporter Yuri Gusakov and called him “kike” and “kike-face” before taking him to the Kotlovo police station where they detained him for several hours. Gusakov was released after his parents paid \$65 USD (2,000 rubles) and Gusakov signed a document stating that he had no complaints about his treatment.

There were instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in the public discussion of their religious views, but such incidences were resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained Mormon missionaries for brief periods throughout the country or asked them to cease their activities, such as displaying signboards on city streets, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing. In January, Mormon missionaries in Pskov were invited to participate in an English-language discussion group by an officer at a military base and then detained and interrogated for illegally entering the base. On January 21, 2002, in Vladivostok, three men, two of them in police uniform, stopped and physically assaulted two Mormon missionaries who were proselytizing in accordance with their religious worker visas. Neither victim reported serious physical injuries. Officials at the district police station refused to accept their complaint. Later intervention by the city police chief led to the case’s resolution.

There were no reported instances of the forcible use of psychiatry in “deprogramming” victims of “totalitarian sects” during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

As a participating state in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Russia has pledged to promote tolerance and non-discrimination and counter threats to security such as intolerance, aggressive nationalism, racist chauvinism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. In July, a Russian delegation attended an OSCE meeting in Geneva focusing on measures to combat anti-Semitism.

There are signs that government officials are taking more aggressive steps to counteract anti-Semitic publications. Beginning in 2002, the Ministry of Press has closed a number of publications and charged others with violating article 282 of the Criminal Code (inciting ethnic hatred). In June 2002, the local prosecutor’s office in Ulyanovsk opened a criminal case under Article 282 against the editor of the local newspaper “Orthodox Simbirsk,” who ran a number of articles demonizing Jews. In January, there were preliminary hearings in Leninskiy District Court. The case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. In July 2002, the Ministry of Press ordered the closure of a newspaper run by the openly anti-Semitic politician Viktor Korchagin. In December, the Moscow City Court accepted a suit brought against Korchagin for inciting hatred against Jews. The case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

On June 10, a delegation composed of representatives from major foreign Jewish organizations met with President Putin. The President also publicly expressed his support for improved relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and Roman Catholics. Prime Minister Kasyanov has stated his support for a papal visit to Moscow.

The Russian Academy for State Service held multiple conferences during the period covered by this report to examine the issue of religious tolerance. A broad range of national and international participants with differing views attended the conferences. The Presidential Academy of State Service also worked with religious freedom advocates such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice to train regional and municipal officials in the proper implementation of the law.

During the reporting year, the Government was more active in preventing or reversing discriminatory actions taken at the local level by more actively disseminating information to the regions and, when necessary, reprimanding the officials at fault. President Putin also sought stricter and more consistent application of fed-

eral laws in the many regions of the country. Working through the Procuracy, the Ministry of Justice, the Presidential Administration, and the courts, the Government has worked to persuade the regions to bring their laws into conformance with federal laws and with the Constitution. Pressure at the federal level reportedly led local officials to rescind an order to dissolve a Muslim mosque in Vologda.

While isolated difficulties with registration continue to appear in different regions around the country, human rights lawyers and representatives of religious minorities report that such difficulties related to the 1997 law have decreased during the period covered by this report. Local courts have upheld the right of non-traditional groups to register or reregister in a number of cases. For example, on April 2, a Chelyabinsk court dismissed a second appeal by the Procurator's office seeking to deny registration to a local youth branch of the Unification Church. An earlier attempt of the regional procurator's office, supported by the Chelyabinsk branch of the Ministry of Justice had been unsuccessful.

In some cases, religious organizations successfully enlisted the assistance of the judiciary to overcome bureaucratic resistance to their registration. A Catholic parish in Magadan, run by U.S. citizen Father Michael Shields, came under continued threat of liquidation by local authorities. Father Shields recently won a court case that challenged the legality of his nomination as priest of the local Catholic parish on the grounds that he is a foreign citizen. Although his parish avoided liquidation, the new Magadan cathedral remains unconsecrated in symbolic recognition of Bishop Mazur's absence, despite the new Bishop's arrival.

Religious groups continued to make use of a February 2002 ruling of the Constitutional Court in the Moscow Salvation Army case to challenge liquidation orders. On August 29, a local judge ruled against the liquidation of the Vanino Baptist Church, basing the decision on that ruling.

There were improvements in the restoration of religious property. In June, city authorities in Oryol approved the restitution of a synagogue in the city after years of petitions by the local Jewish community. The synagogue had been built in 1912 but was confiscated by the Soviet Government. The Buryat leaders of the traditional Buddhist Sangha (Organization) won back the rights to the oldest Buddhist temple in Europe, which was erected in St. Petersburg with funds from the Dalai Lama and the Romanovs in 1909. A more secular group had occupied the temple for the past four years, despite a 2002 city court decision in favor of the Sangha. City officials supported the efforts of the traditional organization to occupy the temple.

In May, representatives of ten faiths came together to stage the Third Interconfessional Exhibition in Moscow's All-Russian Exhibition Center, where they displayed and distributed literature, videocassettes, devotional articles, and goods produced by religious business enterprises. Participants included representatives of the Russian Orthodox, Muslim, Armenian Apostolic, Buddhist, Jewish, Evangelical Christian-Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, and Evangelical Lutheran faiths. According to organizers, the exhibition was intended to promote dialog and tolerance among major religions represented in the country. The main sponsor was the Moscow City government.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens; however, many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is at the heart of what it means to be Russian. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as societal hostility toward Catholics and newer, non-Orthodox, religions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it was often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and religions new to the country, and some Russian Orthodox Church leaders publicly expressed similar views.

There is no large-scale movement in the country to promote interfaith dialog, although on the local level religious groups successfully collaborate on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialog. Russian Pentecostal and Baptist organizations, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church, have been reluctant to support ecumenism. At the international level, the Russian Orthodox Church has traditionally pursued interfaith dialog with other Christians; however, the Patriarch and other Russian Orthodox Church representatives expressed grave displeasure at the Vatican's February 2002 decision to upgrade its four apostolic administrations to dioceses. Clerics, parliamentarians, and members of conservative groups closely associ-

ated with Russian Orthodox and Muslim hierarchies made numerous hostile statements opposing the decision and continue to consider it a source of tension.

Muslims, the largest religious minority, continue to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas. Discrimination has become stronger since the onset of the conflict in the predominantly Muslim region of Chechnya and the takeover of a Moscow theater by armed Chechen separatists on October 23. Muslims have claimed that citizens in certain regions have an irrational fear of Muslims, citing cases such as a dispute in Kolomna over the proposed construction of a mosque. Government officials, journalists, and the public have been quick to label Muslim organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Such sentiment has led to a formal ban on "Wahhabism" in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkariya. In the fall of 2002 and spring of 2003, several prominent human rights activists expressed concern about the rise in anti-Islamic attitudes.

Numerous press reports have documented anti-Islamist acts. The *Washington Post*, 9/9/02 reports that "since September 11, 2001, a Muslim cemetery was desecrated in Krasnodar, a mysterious shooting took place inside a mosque in Irkutsk, a gang broke into a mosque construction site an hour before the groundbreaking ceremony in Volgograd, Muslim women reported having scarves ripped off their heads in Tatarstan, and mullahs were no longer invited to open Tatar political meetings with prayers." *The Bigotry Monitor*, 6/6/03 reported that "on May 30, 2003, glass bottles with flammable mixtures were thrown into a mosque in Irkutsk Oblast, damaging the roof and walls. No injuries were reported among the worshippers who were in the mosque at the time of the incident."

Muslim activists complain that Russia is not entirely a secular state, based on the Government's active support of the Russian Orthodox majority. Muslim recruits serving in the army often are subjected to insults and abuse on the basis of religion. Tatarstan's human rights ombudsman reported that many Muslim youths have deserted the army rather than risk going to Chechnya and fighting fellow Muslims.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers are generally harmonious. In the Volga region, a liberal brand of Islamic thought dubbed "Euro-Islam" has been growing in influence. However, tensions occasionally emerge. In July, a group of Muslim women in Naberezhniye Chelny, Tatarstan attempted to remove masonry at the construction site for an Orthodox church they said was being erected illegally in a local park. On October 1, the site was vandalized again and the authorities opened a criminal case against the alleged perpetrators. The construction site represents the fourth location that the Orthodox have been allocated by the local authorities. On May 30, a mosque in Usole-Sibirsk was fire bombed during a worship service. No one was injured in the attack.

Law enforcement organs are closely watching three Muslim groups operating in Sverdlosk Oblast, in the communities of Krasno-Ufimsk, Pervo-Uralsk, and Yekaterinburg. Calling them extremists, officials have opened criminal cases in the past for distribution of hate literature (but not weapons charges or more severe criminal offenses). In March law enforcement officers confiscated literature that they described as extremist from the local Muslim community in Yekaterinburg. The groups are influential with local Muslims but focus their efforts mainly on the conflict in Chechnya.

Official discrimination, vandalism, and occasional violence against Jews continued, although Jewish leaders have stated publicly that the state-sponsored anti-Semitism of the Soviet era no longer exists. Contrary to previous reporting periods, there were no reports of tax collectors harassing synagogues.

Despite high-level attention to the event, there were no prosecutions in connection with the May 2002 incident in which 28-year-old Tatyana Sapunova was injured severely when trying to remove an anti-Semitic sign that contained an explosive device near Moscow. In June and July 2002, more than fifteen such signs calling for "Death to Kikes" and other slogans were discovered on the roads and streets around the country, some booby-trapped with homemade bombs or grenades, others with fake explosives. Two people died from injuries sustained in attempting to pull signs down. Other devices, without explosives, were found outside Moscow. Moscow police spokesman, Farid Khasanov, referred to one of the mock booby-trapped signs with an anti-semitic message as a "practical joke." President Putin awarded Sapunova the Order of Courage and received her in the Kremlin in July 2002.

In September 2002, a dozen skinhead youths beat up four yeshiva students in Moscow, and in the city of Orenburg, unknown assailants attacked a group of Orthodox Jewish schoolboys. In April a bomb was planted in central Moscow close to a synagogue on Bolshaya Bronnaya Street, although it was not clear whether the bomb was intended to damage the synagogue or a nearby apartment. No one was hurt in the incident. In the weeks leading up to and following the anniversary of Hitler's birth on April 20, Jewish centers and synagogues were vandalized in

Petrozavodsk, Kostroma, Yoshkar-Ola, Novgorod, and St. Petersburg. In the St. Petersburg case, police apprehended the vandals. There were incidents of synagogue vandalism in March and April 2002 in Ulyanovsk, Orenburg, Yoshkar-Ola (Republic of Mari-El), and Kostroma. In Voronezh, vandals broke the windows of a synagogue several times in June. In July, swastikas were drawn on the fence around the St. Petersburg synagogue. In December, Human Rights Ombudsman Mironov called for increased tolerance in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Russia after an incident in Kostroma where a group of young men scrawled anti-Semitic graffiti on a synagogue and broke several windows.

On May 5, 2002, in Rostov, there was an arson attempt on a 130-year-old synagogue. According to the rabbi, the synagogue's windows had been broken five times in the preceding weeks. A synagogue in Yaroslavl was vandalized three times in May and June. On June 28, a synagogue in Kostroma was vandalized. According to a local Jewish leader, the synagogue has suffered numerous attacks in recent years.

Cemetery desecration remained one of the most common types of anti-Semitic attacks. A cemetery in Pyatigorsk, the only Jewish cemetery in Stavropol Kray, was desecrated in June. In April, forty-two gravestones were destroyed in a cemetery in Makhachkala, Dagestan. A number of other Jewish cemeteries were vandalized during the period covered by this report.

Vandals desecrated tombstones in cemeteries dominated by other religious and ethnic minorities in numerous other cases. They include: an Armenian cemetery in Krasnodar in April 2002, Muslim tombs in a Volgograd cemetery in July, a Moscow region cemetery for war prisoners in June, several cemeteries in Irkutsk in July, 400 tombs in Moscow in September, and several acts of vandalism in Kaliningrad. These attacks usually were accompanied by swastikas and other ultra-nationalist symbols.

The ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity (RNE) paramilitary organization continued to propagate hostility toward Jews and non-Orthodox Christians. The RNE appears to have lost political influence in some regions since its peak in 1998, but the organization maintained high levels of activity in other regions, such as Voronezh. In March 2003, a synagogue in Krasnovarsk was desecrated with anti-semitic and "RNE" graffiti. RNE graffiti has appeared in a number of cities, including Krasnodar. A Jewish NGO reported RNE recruitment activities in five localities in the Kostroma region during 2002. In the village of Loparevo, RNE members reportedly attacked a Jewish teenager, leaving him with a concussion and other injuries. In Nerekhta, the RNE posted anti-Semitic leaflets and openly threatened Jewish residents.

A splinter group of the RNE called "Russian Rebirth" has registered successfully in the past in Tver and Nizhniy Novgorod as a social organization, prompting protests from human rights groups. However, in several regions such as Moscow and Kareliya, the authorities have successfully limited the activities of the RNE by denying registration to their local affiliates. Despite losing its registration as a political party, the National Power Party of Russia (NDPR) is still active. On June 12, NDPR activists distributed their newspaper Russian Front in downtown Kostroma along with leaflets reading "Russia, liberate yourself from kike fascism."

A large number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers are distributed throughout the country. They carry anti-Semitic, as well as anti-Muslim and xenophobic leaflets. Jewish organizations published a tally of 73 newspapers and publications that carried anti-Semitic content during the period 2001–2002. However, traditionally anti-Semitic publications with large distributions, such as the newspaper Zavtra, appear to be more careful than in the past about using crude anti-Semitic language.

The number of underground nationalist-extremist organizations (as distinguished from such quasi public groups as RNE) appears to be growing. According to the Ministry of the Interior, there are some 50,000 skinheads in the country, including 2,500 in Moscow. The primary targets of skinheads are foreigners and individuals from the Northern Caucasus, but they express anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments as well. As in previous years, nationalists distributed anti-Semitic literature in Moscow and elsewhere during the Victory Day holiday in May.

For several years the Patriarch has conditioned any visit by the Pope on the settlement of outstanding issues between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, such as allegedly "aggressive" Catholic proselytizing in the country and on Russian Orthodox and Catholic relationships with Ukraine's Greek Catholic Church, which recognizes Rome's authority. In a September interview with an Italian Catholic magazine, Patriarch Aleksey said that the Vatican must drop its "expansionist strategy" if it wanted to improve relations. The Russian Orthodox Church, which had objected strongly to the papal visit to Ukraine in June 2001, dis-

approved of a proposed papal visit to Kazan in the summer. In September, five Russian Orthodox priests in Rostov carried out an airborne religious procession via helicopter, in which they circled the town and neighboring villages praying that the country would be rid of Catholics.

The Vatican's February 2002 decision to upgrade its apostolic administrations to dioceses continued to be a source of controversy. Several local newspapers in the summer and fall of 2002 published anti-Catholic articles, such as an item that appeared in Vologda's "Our Region" newspapers on July 31, which accused Catholics of espionage. Over the summer, Franciscan monks were portrayed in a Moscow newspaper and on television as running a whorehouse out of an apartment. The Russian Journalists Union later condemned the stories as false reporting. In September, unknown assailants shot out the windows of the Catholic Church in Rostov.

Hostility toward "nontraditional" religious groups sparked occasional harassment and even physical attacks. Jehovah's Witnesses are still referred to routinely in the press as a religious "sect," although they have been present in the country for some 100 years. A common prejudice circulating among the general public is that Jehovah's Witnesses are "spies of imperialism." In January, a Jehovah's Witness and her grandmother were beaten to death in Astrakhan. Police found crosses carved into the bodies of the victims and drawn on the walls of their home, leading them to classify the crime as a murder with possible religious motives.

The Jehovah's Witnesses Organization cites two cases in which courts have reportedly discriminated against their religion in cases of child custody. In Dagestan, in April 2002, a mother lost custody of her two children to an absentee father. As a result, his parents are raising the children. The case has been appealed to the European Court of Human Rights. On June 19, 2003, a court in Bashkortostan ordered a mother not to take her children to worship services. The case has been appealed to the Supreme Court.

On March 8, two Mormon missionaries in Vladivostok were attacked by a group of approximately ten intoxicated youths who accompanied their actions with negative remarks about Mormons and Americans. One of the missionaries was beaten unconscious and suffered a dislocated shoulder. There were no reports that any of the culprits were apprehended.

According to the pastor of an evangelical church in the town of Chekhov, Moscow Oblast, the authorities failed to arrest any suspects in an April 2001 arson case directed against the church, and have since abandoned the investigation. There also had been no action in the severe 2001 beating of the pastor of the church, a beating accompanied by both racial and religious insults aimed at the African-born pastor.

On January 18, six individuals vandalized the Moscow Andrey Sakharov Museum by pouring red paint on the walls and paintings and smashing windows in a room housing an exhibition of modern art entitled "Danger, Religion." Upon their arrest, the vandals explained that the exhibition offended their Russian Orthodox beliefs.

Speakers associated with the Russian Orthodox Church took part in anti-sect conferences and meetings around the country. A conference in Yekaterinburg on "Totalitarian Sects as a Threat of Religious Extremism" brought together leading regional politicians and religious leaders. One such speaker claimed that Jehovah's Witnesses and Krishnaites were "totalitarian sects" that had existed underground during the Soviet period. He also referred to Pentecostals as a fraudulent and occult movement. Andrey Kurayev, a Russian Orthodox priest, also warned against sects in publications and on the internet. One such publication calls for the classification of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church as political organizations, which would legally deprive them of financial support from abroad.

In St. Petersburg, the local branch of the pro-Putin youth organization "Moving Together" held a demonstration in February against the Church of Scientology. City officials refused to extend Moving Together's permit and broke up the demonstration. Another organization of young communist sympathizers held a demonstration against a St. Petersburg center run by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Members of some religions continued to face discrimination in their efforts to rent premises and conduct group activities. Religious minorities report both official pressure and personal prejudice as obstacles to renting space. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, which does not recognize the Moscow Patriarchate's authority, has also experienced problems gaining access to gathering places. The Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy's long tenure renting a local community center from a private organization was inexplicably interrupted in July, and at the end of the reporting period, the group had not yet managed to secure a new space.

A continuing pattern of violence, with either religious or political motivations, against religious workers in the North Caucasus was evident during the period covered by this report. Foreign religious workers have been deterred or prohibited from

entering war zones in the North Caucasus, and information about religious activity in the area is largely unavailable.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, a number of religious groups, NGOs, and others in a steady dialog on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok were active throughout the period in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom. U.S. Government officials engaged a broad range of Russian officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis. In the period covered by this report, such contacts included government officials, representatives of over 20 religious confessions, the Slavic Law and Justice Center, the Esther Legal Information Center, the Anti-Defamation League, lawyers representing religious groups, journalists, academics, and human rights activists known for their commitment to religious freedom.

The Embassy and Consulates have worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs designed to sensitize law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. Senior embassy officials discuss religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the Presidential Administration and the Government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, raising specific cases of concern. Russian federal officials have responded by investigating some of those cases and keeping embassy staff informed on issues they have raised. As part of continuing efforts to monitor the overall climate of religious tolerance, the Embassy and Consulates maintained frequent contact with working-level officials at the Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Embassy's strategy for addressing religious freedom centers around maintaining a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO community via frequent communication and meetings. Two positions in the Embassy's political section are dedicated to human rights and religious freedom issues. These officers work closely with consular officers in Moscow and other U.S. Consulates around the country.

Consular officers routinely investigate criminal, customs, and immigration cases involving foreign citizens with a view to determining whether they involve possible violations of religious freedom. Consular officers also raised the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Embassy officers also meet with missionaries during regional travel in the country's interior.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed the theme of religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He attended events on major religious holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and Ramadan. On December 20, the Ambassador held a meeting with Minister of Justice Yuriy Chayka and expressed concern over the inconsistent application of registration requirements by regional MOJ officials. In November, the Deputy Chief of Mission hosted a reception for fifty religious workers and government officials to focus on religious freedom issues.

The U.S. Government presses for the country's adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the State Department meet regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about religious freedom, as well as with visiting representatives of Russian religious organizations. In October and again in May, an officer with responsibilities for religious freedom traveled from Washington to hold meetings in Moscow with faith-based groups and several human rights groups on religious issues. The meetings focused on the importance of respecting the rights of minority religions. On November 7, 11 members of the United States Helsinki Commission and 6 members of Congress urged President Putin to correct a pattern of religious discrimination against foreign religious workers from targeted minority faiths. In their letter, the politicians and activists focused on a perceived pattern of denial of visas to religious workers.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) works to promote tolerance and human rights. USAID/Russia awarded a grant to the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal to continue promoting its "Climate of Trust" program. The program focuses on forming and strengthening Regional Tolerance Councils in Kazan, Ryazan, and Leningrad Oblast. Ethnic and religious leaders, local government officials, and NGO representatives participate in the Councils. In June, the grantee organized a conference on combating hate crimes in Ryazan for over a hundred students and cadets of the Ryazan branch of the Moscow University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Also in June, the grantee organized a conference for

a hundred participants in Kazan to focus on relations among diverse religious groups (including Russian Orthodox, Muslims, and Catholics). Participants attended from the northwest and central regions, the Volga region, and Stavropol, and included ethnic and religious representatives, government officials, and NGO activists.

With financial support from USAID and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), the Volga Humanitarian and Theological Institute in Nizhny Novgorod launched a program to develop legislation in support of the separation of church and state. The program included educational elements concerning the Government's role in public life, civil society, and national identity in the Volga district. USAID/IREX funding also supported the activities of the Ural NGO Support Center in Perm to develop a model program intended to increase effectiveness of Perm youth organizations and build tolerance among youth in the region.

The Open World Leadership Program operated by the legislative branch and housed in the Library of Congress sent a delegation of Russian visitors to the U.S. in June to focus on issues of religious tolerance. Their program included meetings with U.S. Representatives Chris Cannon and Jeff Flake; roundtables at George Washington University, Catholic University and Brigham Young University; and briefings with U.S. officials.

The U.S. Government organized exchanges under the International Visitor program with a focus on religious freedom issues during the period covered by this report. Russian local, regional, and federal officials went to the U.S. in January to participate in the program "Promoting Dialog and tolerance across Ethnic Lines." A group of mullahs, imams, Islamic journalists and directors of Islamic cultural centers participated in a U.S. visitor program entitled "Promoting Multiculturalism: Islam in the U.S."

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy's Democracy Commission, a small (up to \$25,000 USD—approximately 775,000 rubles) grants program supporting Russian NGOs pursuing projects related to ethnic, racial and religious tolerance, approved seven tolerance-related grants totaling approximately \$75,000 USD (2,325,000 rubles).

SAN MARINO

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 23.6 square miles, and its population is approximately 26,900. The Government does not provide statistics on the size of religious groups, and there is no recent census data providing information on religious membership; however, it is estimated that over 95 percent of the population is Catholic. There are also small groups of members of Jehovah's Witnesses and adherents to the Baha'i Faith (who organize small, active missionary groups), some Muslims, and members of the Waldesian Church.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

Although Roman Catholicism is dominant, it is not the state religion, and the law prohibits discrimination based on religion. The Catholic Church receives direct benefits from the State through income tax revenues; taxpayers may request that 0.3 percent of their income tax payments be allocated to the Catholic Church or to "other" charities, including two religions (the Waldesian Church and members of Jehovah's Witnesses).

In 1993 some parliamentarians objected to the traditional 1909 oath of loyalty sworn on the “Holy Gospels.” Although they eventually swore the oath as required, the parliamentarians contended that it violated the European Convention and brought suit in the European Court of Human Rights. Following this objection, Parliament changed the law in 1993 to permit a choice between the traditional oath and one in which the reference to the Gospels was replaced by “on my honor.” In 1999 the European Court found that the requirement that Members of Parliament swear their loyalty on the “Holy Gospels” violated religious freedom. However, its ruling also implicitly endorsed the revised 1993 legal formulation. The Court also noted that the traditional oath still is mandatory for other offices, such as the Captain Regent or a member of the Government; however, to date, no elected Captain Regent or government member has challenged the validity of the 1909 oath.

There are no private religious schools; the school system is public and is financed by the State. Public schools provide Catholic religious instruction; however, students may choose without penalty not to participate.

Epiphany, Saint Agata, Easter, Corpus Domini, All Saints Day, Commemoration of the Dead, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas are considered national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Amicable relations exist between the religious communities, and government and religious officials encourage mutual respect for differences.

Roman Catholicism is not a state religion but it is dominant in society, as most citizens were born and raised under Catholic principles that form part of their culture. These principles still permeate state institutions symbolically; for example, crucifixes sometimes hang on courtroom or government office walls. They also affect societal lifestyles independently of individual compliance with Catholic precepts (such as strictures on divorce).

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

The Constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and its constituent republics provide for freedom of religion, and state union and republican Governments generally respect this right in practice. There is no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro (SAM); however, the majority Serbian Orthodox Church receives some preferential consideration.

The status of respect for religious freedom by both the state union and republican Governments improved during the period covered by this report. The state union Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, established in March 2003, has set up an office dedicated to religious affairs that has made outreach to minority religious communities a top priority. Representatives of the Jehovah’s Witnesses reported the elimination of restrictions on importation of religious literature during the period covered by this report.

There were some instances of discrimination against representatives of religious minorities in Serbia and Montenegro. The Jewish community reported an increase in anti-Semitic incidents, primarily involving hate speech and vandalism, during the period covered by this report. Jewish leaders and leaders of other minority religious communities often relate acts of vandalism to negative media reporting directed toward sects, known as “cults.” Police and government officials have taken some positive steps in response to acts of hate speech and vandalism.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the state union and republican Governments in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy representatives meet regularly with representatives of ethnic and religious minorities as well as with government representatives to promote respect for religious freedom.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The state union of Serbia and Montenegro (excluding U.N.-administered Kosovo) has a total land area of nearly 35,300 square miles and a population of approximately 8,662,000. The predominant faith in the country is Serbian Orthodoxy. Religion plays a small but growing role in public life. Approximately 78 percent of the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro are Serbian Orthodox, including most ethnic Serbs and Montenegrins who profess a religion. The Muslim faith is the second largest in Serbia and Montenegro, with approximately 5 percent of the population, including Slavic Muslims in the Sandzak, and ethnic Albanians in Montenegro and Southern Serbia. Roman Catholics make up about four percent of the population of Serbia and Montenegro, mostly Hungarians in Vojvodina, ethnic Albanians in Montenegro, and Croats in Vojvodina and Montenegro. Protestants make up about one percent of the population and include Adventists, Baptists, Reformed Christians, Evangelical Christians, Evangelical Methodists, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Christ, Pentecostals, and Mormons. Serbia and Montenegro has a small and aging Jewish population numbering just a few thousand. The remainder of the population professes other faiths or considers themselves atheists.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and laws of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro and its constituent republics provide for the freedom of religion, and the Governments generally respect this right in practice. There is no state religion in Serbia and Montenegro; however, the Montenegrin Republic's Constitution mentions the Serbian Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community, and Roman Catholic Church by name. The majority Serbian Orthodox Church receives some preferential consideration.

In the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the predecessor of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, religious groups were required to apply to the Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs for registration. A new Federal Law on Religious Freedom, criticized both by the Serbian Orthodox Church and by minority religious communities, was not enacted before the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ceased to exist in February 2003. As a result, with the dissolution of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the abolition of the Federal Ministry of Religious Affairs, the requirement for religious groups to register has lapsed. At the end of the period covered by this report, there were reports about a new attempt to pass a Religious Freedom Law for the Republic of Serbia; it is likely that this law would govern registration of religious groups in Serbia.

By the end of the period covered by this report, there was no formal registration of religions in both Serbia and Montenegro. However, to gain the status of juridical person necessary for real estate and other administrative transactions, religious groups may register as citizen groups with the Ministry of Interior in their home republic. During the period covered by this report, the state union Government rescinded the citizen group registration of the Society for Spiritual Science—Sanatan. According to government sources, Sanatan documents included tenets promoting criminality.

Religious education in Serbian primary and secondary schools continued during the period covered by this report. According to a 2001 Serbian government regulation, students are required either to attend classes from one of the seven "traditional religious communities:" Serbian Orthodoxy, Islam, Roman Catholicism, the Slovak Evangelical Church, Judaism, the Reform Christian Church, or the Evangelical Christian Church or can elect to substitute a class in civic education. The proportion of students registering for religious education grew during the period covered by this report, but registrations for civic education courses continued to predominate. Some protestant leaders and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Serbia continued to voice their objection to the teaching of religion in public schools as well as to proposals that would classify some of Serbia's religions as traditional.

Prior to its dissolution in February 2003, the Yugoslav Federal Government organized a round table entitled "Religious Freedom in South-Eastern Europe." This round table included participants from the Government, the international commu-

nity, and a broad spectrum of religious leaders, including representatives of minority religious groups. In addition to serving as an opportunity for inter-religious dialog, the meeting ended with a declaration encouraging tolerance and freedom of religion.

There was no progress noted during the period covered by this report on restitution of previously seized church property. By the end of the period covered by this report, there were indications that restitution of religious property would be addressed in Serbia by a wider law on restitution of nationalized private property. During the period covered by this report, the Republic of Montenegro abolished its Ministry of Religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although the armed forces continue to offer only Serbian Orthodox services, the Serbia and Montenegro Ministry of Defense has prepared a regulation to introduce religious services for Catholics and Muslims in the Army and to grant leave to members of other minority faiths to attend religious services outside their barracks and to spend important religious holidays with their families. The Army is also introducing dietary considerations to meet the needs of Islamic soldiers.

Protestants and foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize. There were no reports that missionaries from the United States were denied visas for religious work, and members of the Jehovah's Witnesses have reported no problems obtaining long-term residence permits or proselytizing.

Representatives of the Islamic Community in Belgrade were wary of the potential for government interference in affairs between their community and the Islamic Community of Novi Pazar.

The Belgrade Islamic community also reported continued difficulties in acquiring land and government approval for an Islamic cemetery near the city.

The Government of the Republic of Montenegro challenged a decision by the Ministry of Defense of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to transfer military property into the hands of the majority Serbian Orthodox Church. 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 was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

While in previous years, members of Jehovah's Witnesses have reported their members serving sentences for conscientious objection to the draft, they reported no such detainees at the end of the period covered by this report. The state union Government has begun to implement civilian service as an alternative to mandatory army service. Civilian service options will complement the non-lethal options already present for conscripts who object to military service for reasons of conscience. Some journalists question whether conscientious objector regulations will extend to adult converts, who are former conscripts who wish to leave the ready reserve.

Representatives of a human rights organization in Montenegro reported discrimination against a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses from Berane who received a 1-year sentence for use of a counterfeit banknote. These human rights activists questioned the strength of the evidence presented in the case and noted that the defendant's membership in the Jehovah's Witnesses was included in the court decision.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversions

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

With the establishment of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro, the Federal Secretariat for Religious Affairs was disbanded. In addition to including freedom of conscience and religious practice in its founding documents, the state union of Serbia and Montenegro set up an office of religious affairs as part of its Ministry of Human and Minority Rights. According to sources within this ministry, the office views some of its main tasks as outreach to smaller religious communities and coordination between these groups and other government entities, such as the police. Representatives of minority religious communities reported good relations with this office.

Due to the passage of new legislation on public information in Serbia in April 2003, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses report experiencing no problems import-

ing their religious literature. The Jehovah's Witnesses also report improved police and fire department response to vandalism against their religious objects.

In 2002 Serbian courts began proceedings in the Savic case, in which an author of anti-Semitic literature was tried for spreading racial or national hatred through the printed word. According to sources in the Jewish community of Serbia and Montenegro, a number of continuances have been issued in this trial; the case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. The latest continuance was granted to allow for a psychiatric examination of the defendant.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

While relations between members of different religious groups, particularly in Serbia, are good, there were some instances of discrimination against representatives of religious minorities in the country. Religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout Serbia and Montenegro, and in many cases it is difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin. A number of the incidents of religious discrimination or harassment that occurred during the period covered by this report appear to have been based more on ethnicity than on religion.

In April 2003, Josip Tikvicki, an Adventist pastor in Zrenjanin, Serbia, was severely beaten after responding to the breaking of church windows. According to church sources, the Adventist Church in Zrenjanin had been the scene of a number of attacks in 2002, but the vandals were never apprehended. Following this latest attack, a representative of the Serbia and Montenegro Ministry of Human and Minority Rights visited the hospitalized cleric and publicly criticized the incident. Three persons were apprehended for the attack, were tried and given sentences of several months each. No progress was made in the case of a Hare Krishna adherent who was stabbed in Jagodina in Fall 2001.

A representative of Belgrade's Islamic community claimed that two murders in March were related to their victims' Islamic identity. One of the victims was the grandson of a former Imam in Belgrade; at the end of the murder trial, the defendant reportedly made an anti-Islamic slur. In the other incident, inmates in prison in Pozarevac reportedly killed a Muslim Roma inmate. During attempts to confirm these reports with other contacts in the Islamic and Roma communities, alternative motives for these crimes were given, other than religious identity.

On December 24, 2002, a group of Orthodox protestors prevented Anglican worshippers from entering the Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate in Belgrade where they traditionally have celebrated Christmas midnight mass. This act was severely criticized by then Yugoslav President Vojislav Kostunica as well as by the nation's human rights community.

Minority religious communities report continued problems with vandalism of church buildings, cemeteries and other religious premises. According to the Forum 18 News Service, approximately 30 attacks occurred during the period covered by this report, including a Molotov cocktail being thrown at a Sanatan residence outside Belgrade. Many of the attacks involved spray-painted graffiti, rock throwing, or the defacing of tombstones but a number of cases involved much more extensive damage. There were about ten incidents in which gravestones were desecrated, including those in Jewish, Islamic, and Lutheran cemeteries.

Jewish leaders reported a continued increase in anti-Semitism both in the media and in acts of vandalism like the destruction of gravestones. According to representatives of the Union of Jewish Communities of Serbia and Montenegro, anti-Semitic hate speech often appears in small-circulation books. The release of new books (or reprints of translations of anti-Semitic foreign literature) often leads to a spike in hate mail and other expressions of anti-Semitism. These same sources associated anti-Semitism to anti-western and anti-globalization sentiments as well as nationalism.

Journalists and religious leaders noted the continuation of anti-sect propaganda in the Serbian press. Minority Christian churches, like Baptists, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others often are given the sect moniker in the press in Serbia and Montenegro. Religious leaders have noted that instances of vandalism often occur soon after press reports on sects. According to some sources, the fact that one of Serbia's leading experts on sects is a police captain whose works are used in military and police academies further complicates this situation.

In Montenegro, Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox Communities coexist within the same towns and often use the same municipally owned properties to conduct worship services. Tensions exist between the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin Orthodox Church, but these tensions are largely political, stemming from Montenegro's on-again, off-again drive for independence that started in 1997. Never-

theless, the Montenegrin Orthodox Church remains schismatic in the eyes of official Orthodoxy, and tensions between the two churches continued. One focus of controversy continued to be the Berane Yule Log ceremony. This year Montenegrin Orthodox believers burned their Yule Log in a village a small distance from Berane, thereby avoiding a confrontation with Serbian Orthodox believers. The two churches continue to contend for adherents and to make conflicting property claims, but this contention has not been marked by previous incidents of violence. However, NGO representatives reported concern at the level of nationalism and hate speech in Montenegro. Members of minority religious communities in Montenegro also reported being labeled “sects” and receiving threatening phone calls as a result.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government continues to promote ethnic and religious tolerance throughout Serbia and Montenegro. Embassy officials meet regularly with the leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Government (including ministers and deputy ministers) to promote the respect of religious freedom and human rights. In support of tolerance and respect for religious minorities in the armed forces, Embassy officials coordinated the participation of a representative of the Armed Forces of Serbia and Montenegro in a Marshall Center conference on the role of religion in the military.

Kosovo

Kosovo continued to be administered under the civil authority of the U.N. Interim Administrative Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1244. This resolution called for “substantial autonomy and meaningful self-administration” for the persons of Kosovo “within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.” UNMIK and its chief administrator, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), established a civil administration in 1999, following the conclusion of the NATO military campaign that forced the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo. Since that time, the SRSG and UNMIK, with the assistance of the international community, have worked with local leaders to build the institutions and expertise necessary for self-government under UNSCR 1244.

The UNMIK-promulgated Constitutional Framework provides for freedom of religion, as does UNMIK Regulation 1999/24 on applicable law in Kosovo; UNMIK and the provisional institutions of self-government (PISG) generally respected this right in practice. The number of attacks by Kosovo Albanians against Orthodox Kosovo Serbs, which peaked following the NATO campaign in 1999, decreased markedly during the period covered by this report.

The status of respect for religious freedom improved somewhat during the period covered by this report. By the end of the reporting period, there was some movement by Kosovo leaders to reach out to the Serbian Orthodox minority, including discussion in the Kosovo Government concerning allocation of a portion of the Kosovo Consolidated Budget surplus to support the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to Kosovo.

Ethnic tensions between Kosovo’s Albanians and Serb populations remained noticeable. Most of these tensions were largely rooted in ethnic, rather than religious, bias. Some Orthodox Churches were attacked, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, but the number of such attacks decreased. Protection of Serbian Orthodox Churches and other religious symbols continues to be transferred from the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) to U.N. international police and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS).

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with UNMIK, the PISG, and religious representatives in Kosovo in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government also supports UNMIK and KFOR in their security and protection arrangements for churches and patrimonial sites.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

Kosovo has a total land area of approximately 4,211 square miles and has a population of approximately 2 million. 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, is Islam, although religion is not a significant factor in public life. The Kosovo Serb population, of who about 100,000 reside in Kosovo and 225,000 in Serbia and Montenegro, are largely Serbian Orthodox. Approximately three percent of ethnic Albanians are Roman

Catholic. Protestants make up less than one percent of the population, but have small populations in most of Kosovo's cities.

Foreign clergy actively practice and proselytize. There are Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant missionaries active in Kosovo. There are 64 faith-based or religious organizations registered with UNMIK who list their goals as the provision of humanitarian assistance or faith-based outreach.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

In May 2001, UNMIK promulgated the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo (the "Constitutional Framework"), which established the PISG and replaced the UNMIK-imposed Joint Interim Administrative Structure. Following November 2001 central elections, the 120-member Kosovo Assembly held its inaugural session in December 2001. In March 2002, the Assembly selected Kosovo's President, Prime Minister, and Government. Since that time, UNMIK has transferred certain authorities to the PISG, while retaining authority in such areas as security and protection of communities.

Kosovo's Constitutional Framework incorporates international human rights conventions and treaties, including those provisions that protect religious freedom and prohibit discrimination based on religion and ethnicity; UNMIK and PSIG generally respect this right in practice. UNMIK, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the PISG officially promote respect for religious freedom and tolerance in administering Kosovo and in carrying out programs for its reconstruction and development.

There are no specific licensing regulations with regard to religious groups; however, in order to purchase property or receive funding from UNMIK or other international organizations, religious organizations must register with UNMIK as a non-governmental organization (NGO). There have been some complaints by Kosovar Muslim leaders that they are not consulted prior to registration of foreign Islamic NGOs.

UNMIK recognizes as official holidays some, but not all, religious holidays of both the Muslim and Orthodox faiths.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

UNMIK, the PISG, and KFOR policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The number of attacks on Serbian Orthodox churches continued to decrease during the period covered by this report. Members of the PISG and some political leaders have reached out to Serbian Orthodox officials and expressed a public commitment to assist in the reconstruction of some damaged or destroyed churches. Catholic leaders reported that Muslim Albanian Kosovars had assisted in the repair and reconstruction of Catholic churches damaged by time or by the FRY/Serbian regime prior to 1999, in places such as Malisevo/Malisheve, Pristina, Prizren, Gnjilane/Gjilan, and the Rugova gorge, near Pec/Peje.

The withdrawal of FRY and Serbian troops from Kosovo in 1999 and establishment of UNMIK resulted in an improved situation for the majority, largely Muslim, ethnic Albanian population, and a cessation of attacks on their mosques and religious sites. One of the most serious challenges facing the international community in its administration of Kosovo has been to stop ethnically-motivated attacks on Serb Orthodox churches and shrines and on the Orthodox population of Kosovo. KFOR and UNMIK international police, with increasing participation of the Kosovo Police Service, were able to significantly reduce crimes against Orthodox persons and sites.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Ethnicity and religion are closely entwined in Kosovo. While most Kosovo Albanians identify themselves as Muslim, the designation has more of a cultural than religious connotation. Kosovo Serbs identify themselves with the Serbian Orthodox

Church, which defines not only their religious but also their cultural and historical perspectives. During and after the conflict, some Serbian Orthodox leaders played a moderating political role, but most have since withdrawn from political life as secular Serb leaders have stepped forward, especially following the November 2001 elections and subsequent establishment of Kosovo's Provisional Institutions.

Societal violence continued to decrease steadily during the period covered by this report, although the incidence of violence against Serbs remained steady. Of 72 murders in Kosovo during the reporting period, there were 10 Serb victims, although none of these murders are believed to have been religiously motivated. There were no reported incidents of rock-throwing or other assaults against Serbian Orthodox clergy, but monks and nuns at some monasteries reportedly remain unable to use parts of the monasteries' properties due to concerns about safety.

Security concerns had a chilling effect on the Serb community and their freedom of movement, which also affected their freedom to worship. Serb families with relatives living in both Kosovo and Serbia are restricted by security concerns from traveling to join them for religious holidays or ceremonies, including weddings and funerals. Due to such concerns, Bishop Artemije Radosavljevic, the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo, remains in a monastery in the Serbian enclave of Gracanica rather than return to the diocesan seat in Prizren. UNMIK police and KFOR have designed several mechanisms to provide security to improve mobility, and the OSCE reported some improvement in freedom of movement, particularly in the eastern region.

Attacks on Serbian Orthodox religious sites, presumably by ethnic Albanian extremists, continued during the period covered by this report, although these incidents continued to decrease significantly. There were incidents of vandalism at religious sites, including a fire set in the remains of the Zociste Monastery in Orahovac/Rahovec municipality (which was destroyed in the aftermath of the conflict); damage to the Orthodox cemetery in Decani/Decane; and explosions in November 2002 that seriously damaged two Orthodox churches in Istog. Anti-Orthodox expressions continued during the period covered by this report. In April the Student Union leader at Pristina University called for the removal of the Serbian Church located on University grounds. The Education Ministry later requested that the Pristina municipality authorities fence off university grounds and indicated that all non-university buildings—including the church—should be removed; by the end of the reporting period, there was no action taken against the church. In Djakovica/Gjakova, a dispute arose between the municipality mayor and KFOR regarding the mayor's decision to build a memorial on the site of a Serbian Church destroyed days after the cessation of hostilities in 1999; no action was taken by the end of the reporting period.

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. Due to improving security conditions and decreasing interethnic tensions in some areas, KFOR removed static checkpoints from most churches and religious sites during the period covered by this report, relying instead on patrols by the 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, although the head priest at the Pristina Orthodox Church reported that the situation deteriorated and stone attacks increased after the November 2002 security transfer from KFOR to mobile KPS patrols.

Protestants also report suffering some violence and discrimination. They have alleged mistreatment by "Islamic fundamentalists," who they claim attend Protestant services in order to identify participants for later harassment. One such attack occurred in Gjilan/Gnjilane in May, when a member of a Protestant Evangelical Church was badly beaten on his way home from church. Religious leaders claim that the police failed to conduct a proper investigation to avoid uncovering a possibly divisive religious motive. Protestants also have complained of vandalism of churches and theft of church property. They reported discrimination in relation to media access, particularly by the public Radio and Television Kosovo (RTK).

Protestants report acceptance by the majority Muslim community. However, some have observed that they are not included in some interfaith initiatives by Islamic leadership on the grounds that they do not comprise a "traditional" religion in Kosovo. For example, the Working Group established by the Kosovo Government to draft a law governing the legal status of religious communities failed to include Protestants.

Islamic, Orthodox, and Catholic religious leaders have attempted to encourage tolerance and peace in Kosovo, in both the religious and political spheres. Kosovar political leaders—including Kosovo Government officials and political party leaders—have been increasingly active in publicly calling for tolerance.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues and has sought to promote ethnic and religious tolerance in Kosovo. U.S. Office officials have also maintained close contacts with religious leaders.

Since December 2000, the U.S. Government has provided significant funding to Radio KIM (Radio Caglavica), based at Gracanica Monastery, which broadcasts in both Serbian and the Roma language. Serbian Orthodox Bishop Artemije's clerical staff runs the station, and it broadcasts news, music, interviews, and cultural programs. U.S. KFOR peacekeeping troops have worked to prevent ethnic and religious violence in Kosovo and have guarded religious sites. The U.S. is involved actively in UNMIK, the interim administration mission in Kosovo, which is aimed at securing peace, facilitating refugee return and reconstruction, laying the foundations for democratic self-government, and fostering respect for human rights regardless of ethnicity or religion. During the period covered by this report, the U.S. Government funded a partial survey of Islamic manuscripts in Kosovo, in order to help the local Islamic community preserve their religious heritage.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, anti-Semitism persisted among some elements of the population.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 18,933 square miles, and its population is 5,396,193. According to the 2001 census, the number of persons who claimed a religious affiliation increased from 72.8 percent in 1991 to 84.1 percent in 2001. This increase may be in part due to greater willingness among persons to state their affiliation, unlike in 1991 immediately after the fall of communism. According to the census, there were 3,708,120 Roman Catholics (68.9 percent of the population), 372,858 Augsburg Lutherans (6.9 percent), 219,831 Byzantine Catholics (4.1 percent), 109,735 members of the Reformed Christian Church (2 percent), 50,363 Orthodox Christians (1 percent), and 20,630 members of Jehovah's Witnesses. There were also approximately 3,562 Baptists, 3,217 Brethren Church members, 3,429 Seventh-day Adventists, 3,905 Apostolic Church members, 7,347 Evangelical Methodist Church members, 2,310 Jewish members, 1,733 Old Catholic Church members, 6,519 Christian Corps in Slovakia members, and 1,696 Czechoslovak Husite Church members. According to the 2001 census, 12 percent of the population claimed no religious affiliation, and 2 percent were undecided. There were also some Muslims living in the country, primarily immigrants from Middle Eastern countries or international students. Estimates of the Muslim population vary from 500 to 5,000.

There are 3 categories of nonregistered religions that comprise approximately 30 groups: nontraditional religions (Ananda Marga, Hare Krishna, Yoga in Daily Life, Osho, Sahadza Yoga, Shambaola Slovakia, Sri Chinmoy, Zazen International Slovakia, Zen Centermyo Sahn Sah, Rosicrucians, Raelians, and Moon Sect); the syncretic religious societies (Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, Movement of the Holy Grail, and the Baha'i Faith); and the Christian religious societies (The Church of Christ, Manna Church, International Association of Full Evangelium Traders, Christian Communities, Nazarenes, New Revelation, Word of International Life, Society of the Friends of Jesus Christ, Sword of Spirit, Disciples of Jesus Christ, Universal Life, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons),

Free Peoples' Mission, Presbyterian Church Emmanuel, and Brothers in Christ (Christadelphians).

The number of immigrants is insignificant. There are some very small numbers of refugees who practice different faiths than the majority of native-born citizens. Missionaries do not register with the Government and no official statistics exist, although according to government information, there are missionaries from the Roman Catholic, Augsburg Lutheran, and Methodist faiths as well as a Jewish emissary active in the country. From among the nonregistered churches, there are Mormon missionaries.

There is some correlation between religious differences and ethnic or political differences. The Christian Democratic Party (KDH), which has ties to the Catholic faith, is the only political party with an explicitly religious agenda. The Slovak Democratic Christian Union (SDKU) is a Christian Democratic party similar to those found in many western European countries, and the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) also has a Christian wing.

Followers of the Orthodox Church live predominantly in the eastern part of the country near the Ukrainian border. The Ruthenian minority are typically adherents to the Orthodox faith. The Reformed Christian Church exists primarily in the south, near the border with Hungary, where many ethnic Hungarians live. Other religious groups tend to be spread evenly across the country.

According to a poll conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences in 1998, the number of religious practitioners increased from 73 percent in 1991 to 83 percent in 1998. Approximately 54 percent of Catholics and 22 percent of Lutherans actively participate in formal religious services.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution provides for the right to practice the religion of one's choice, the right to change religion or faith, and the right to refrain from any religious affiliation. The Government observes and enforces these provisions in practice.

The law provides for freedom of religion and defines the status of religious groups, including those groups not registered with the Government. It does not prohibit the existence of nontraditional religions. It allows the Government to enter agreements with religious communities. The law is applied and enforced in a nondiscriminatory fashion.

Governmental entities at all levels, including the courts, interpret the law in a way that protects religious freedom.

No official state religion exists; however, because of the numbers of adherents, Catholicism is considered the dominant religion. The Catholic Church receives significantly larger government subsidies because it has the most clergy. In November 2001, the Government signed an international treaty with the Vatican, which provides the legal framework for relations between the country's Catholic Church, the Government, and the Vatican. Four corollaries to the framework treaty have been proposed. The Government approved one of the corollaries regarding military service for priests. The remaining three corollaries, including a proposal to allow Catholic government employees to refuse to perform official functions on religious grounds, remained under consideration at the end of the period covered by this report.

In April 2002, the Government signed an agreement with an additional 11 registered religious groups in an attempt to counterbalance the Vatican agreement and provide equal status to the remaining registered religions. This agreement is subordinate to national law and subject to amendment by statute; the Vatican treaty, as an international agreement, can only be amended through international legal mechanisms.

Registration of religious groups is not required, but under existing law, only registered religious groups have the explicit right to conduct public worship services and other activities, although no specific religions or practices are banned or discouraged by the authorities in practice. Those that register receive government benefits, including subsidies for clergymen and office expenses. Government funding also is provided to religious schools and to teachers who lecture on religion in state schools. The Government occasionally subsidizes one-time projects and significant religious activities, and registered religious groups are partly exempt from paying taxes and import custom fees. A religion may elect not to accept the subsidies. By law, funding is based on the number of clergy, not the number of adherents, result-

ing in some religions with fewer members receiving more funding than those with more. In 2001 the New Apostolic Church was registered, raising the number of registered religious groups from 15 to 16.

To register a new religion, a group must submit a list of 20,000 permanent residents who adhere to that religion. The 14 religions already established before the law passed in 1991 were exempt from the membership requirement. Although the Nazarene and the Muslim communities existed in the country prior to 1991, they were never properly registered and therefore were not given registered status under the 1991 law. Two additional religious groups have been allowed to register since 1991, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the New Apostolic Church. Leaders of a number of minority religious communities, in particular Muslims, smaller Protestant churches, the Hare Krishna community, and the Church of Scientology have complained about the membership requirement, which effectively bars them from obtaining registered status. Nonregistered religious groups may not build public places of worship or conduct legally valid religious ceremonies such as weddings. In 2000 the Muslim community in Bratislava purchased a plot of land with the hope of building an Islamic center, but municipal officials continue to deny permission for the construction. Because the law on registration of religious groups does not provide for registration of non-theistic 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.

Public school curriculum allowed students to choose to study religion or ethics from grade five to grade nine. These courses often are taught by religious leaders, and the religious groups themselves are responsible for providing instructors, although their salaries are covered from the government budget. There is a lack of appropriate teachers for certain religions. Some representatives of religious groups complain that the status of religious lecturers is not equal with that of regular teachers. Religious lecturers usually are hired on contract and are not paid during the 2-month summer vacation.

In February 2001, the Ministry of Education and the Institute of Judaism undertook a joint educational project on Jewish history and culture that is targeted to elementary and high school teachers of history, civic education, and ethics to educate the public about Jewish themes and increase tolerance toward minorities. The Government, as an associate member, is seeking to obtain full membership in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The project has continued to be very successful and well received. In 2002 four teachers participated in summer training programs in the United States, and in 2003 an additional teacher attended.

There are several religious holidays that are celebrated as national holidays, including Epiphany, the Day of the Virgin Mary of the Seven Sorrows, All Saints Day, St. Stephen's Day, Christmas, and Easter. A treaty with the Vatican prohibits the removal or alteration of existing religious holidays considered as state holidays. However, none of these holidays appear to impact negatively any religious groups.

The Department of Church Affairs at the Ministry of Culture oversees relations between religious groups and the State and manages the distribution of state subsidies to religious groups and associations. However, the Ministry cannot intervene in the internal affairs of religious groups and does not direct their activities. The Ministry administers a cultural state fund, Pro Slovakia, which among other things, allocates money to cover the repair of religious monuments. Public cooperation was integral to the reconstruction of a Jewish cemetery in Bratislava, which involved rerouting tram tracks. The site, including the grave of 19th-century Jewish scholar Chatam Sofer, was restored in 2001 with substantial financing from the Bratislava Local Council as well as from a foreign organization, the International Committee for the Preservation of the Gravesites of Geonai in Pressburg.

Under the auspices of the government Office for National Minorities and Human Rights, an official agreement was signed between the Government and the Greek Catholic and Orthodox Churches to conclude property disputes stemming from the Communist and post-World War II eras. Since 1989 the Government has promoted interfaith dialog 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 Jewish community was invited and sends observers but chose not to participate.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Although government support is provided in a non-discriminatory way to registered religious groups that seek it, the requirement that a registered organization have 20,000 members disadvantages some smaller faiths. The Government monitors but does not interfere with, religious "cults" and "sects." Some property restitution cases remain unresolved.

The Institute of State-Church Relations monitors and researches religious cults and sects; however, it is difficult to identify these groups because they largely register as nongovernmental organizations rather than as religious groups. The Institute conducts seminars, issues publications, and provides information to the media regarding its findings. The Institute's budget comes mainly from the Ministry of Culture's general fund, although it has received some grants for its projects from other sources. Other organizations not funded by the Government, such as the Center for the Study of Sects, engage in similar work.

Some Scientologists complain of harassment by the Slovak Information Service (SIS). In 2002 stories appeared in the media that were critical of companies that have ties to Scientology, including reports that the SIS director was concerned that a company with an indirect connection to the Church of Scientology had won a contract to provide the Government with a new computer system. The award was eventually cancelled, and a new one had not been announced by the end of the period covered by this report.

Law 282/93 on Restitution of Communal Property enabled all religious groups to apply for the return of their property that was 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 was not vacated by the former tenant, often a school or hospital with nowhere else to go.

There also have been problems with the return of property that had been undeveloped at the time of seizure but upon which there since has been construction. Churches, synagogues, and cemeteries have been returned, albeit mostly in poor condition. Religious groups often lack the funds to restore these properties to a usable condition. The main obstacles to the resolution of outstanding restitution claims are the Government's lack of financial resources, due to its austerity program, and bureaucratic resistance on the part of those entities required to vacate restitutable properties. The Reformed Christian Church has been vocal regarding its unfulfilled restitution claims. The Church exists primarily in poorer areas of the country where there is little money for restoration; it is seeking funds from abroad.

While the Orthodox Church reported that six of the seven properties on which it had filed claims already had been returned, the Catholic Church and the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic (UZZNO) reported lower rates of success. The Catholic Church reported that more than half of the property that it had claimed had been returned to it already. In another 12 percent of cases, the property had been returned legally to the Church but typically was occupied by other tenants and would require court action to be returned to church hands. The Church had not received any compensation for the remaining 40 percent of claims since these properties were undeveloped at the time of nationalization but since have been developed. The Church also is not eligible to reacquire lands that originally were registered to church foundations that no longer exist or no longer operate in the country, like the Benedictines.

UZZNO has reported some successful cases of restitution and has only a few pending cases that require resolution. These include cases in which property had been restituted to UZZNO but not in usable condition, cases in which the property still is occupied by previous tenants, and lands upon which buildings had been constructed after the seizure of the property.

Following 2 years of negotiations, the Deputy Prime Minister's office drafted a proposal of compensation for heirless property owned by Jewish families before the Holocaust. In September 2002, the Cabinet agreed to \$18,747,253 (SKK 850 million) in compensation for this property. The entire amount has been placed into an account at the Slovak National Bank, and one-third of it has been made available immediately as needed due to the advancing age of Holocaust survivors. The Jewish community will draw interest on the account for 10 years before receiving the remaining principal. The community intends to use the funds for compensation to some community members as well as to fund social, educational, and cultural programs.

In February 2002, Parliament passed an amendment to Law 206, which allows compensation to Jewish Holocaust victims who lived in the country's territory when it was occupied by Hungary. Law 305 compensates the victims or direct heirs of victims of Nazi persecution during World War II in the wartime State. The deadline for applications under the amendment was November 2002. UZZNO filed a lawsuit against Germany to reclaim compensation of \$425,000 (SKK 19,269,500) that the wartime Government paid to Germany to cover the cost to deport 57,000 Jews. The lawsuit was postponed until 2003.

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 religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Few communication problems exist among the major faiths, and there are several ecumenical organizations that foster closer relationships. The Ecumenical Council of Churches operates and comprises several religions. Some of the recognized religious groups formed a working group on religion and sects, which functions as the authority on new religious movements. President Schuster brought together the heads of all the registered faiths for a meeting on New Year's Day to highlight previous issues successfully resolved, such as pastoral services in the military and the completion of governmental treaties with all the major faiths in the country.

Anti-Semitism continues to persist among some elements of society, manifested occasionally in incidences of violence and vandalism. According to estimates, 500 to 800 neo-Nazis and 3,000 to 5,000 sympathizers operate in the country and commit serious offenses; however, only a small number of these abuses are prosecuted. The Penal Code stipulates that anyone who publicly demonstrates sympathy towards fascism or movements oppressing human rights and freedoms can be sentenced to jail for up to 3 years. Legislation is similar to that of neighboring countries, but court delays and insufficient legal remedies have prevented comparable improvements in the situation.

The low number of prosecutions for racially motivated crime generally improved over the past year due to the creation of a specialized police unit and an advisor in the Bratislava Regional Police. Their successes included the arrest of 24 skinheads, including one of the major neo-Nazi organizers, at a large meeting in 2003. In another success, the Bratislava Police checked 158 suspected meeting places of extremist groups in an overnight raid, which resulted in 14 arrests. Due to this monitoring unit and its NGO advisory board, the police are better trained in identifying neo-Nazi members and more informed about their activities. However, activists expressed the need for more resources to be devoted to raise the number of specialists to at least two officers in each of the country's eight regions.

A musical skinhead group called Judenmord (Murder of Jews) has established a Webpage and participated in several concerts in the country as well as in the neighboring Czech Republic. The Jewish community has called on the Government to ban this openly anti-Semitic band, which the Government had not done by the end of the period covered by this report. The police have not completed this investigation, and the group's record "Arbeit macht frei" still remains popular among skinheads.

Some organizations, such as the official cultural organization Matica Slovenska, and the Slovak National Party (SNS), continue to seek the rehabilitation of former leaders of the Nazi-collaborationist State under Josef Tiso. Meetings and demonstrations to commemorate the anniversary of the first Slovak State from World War II occurred throughout the country. Despite protests by UZZNO, Matica Slovenska gave Jozef Mikus, a top official in the Tiso regime, an award for the protection of human rights. President Schuster also was criticized for awarding the Pribina Cross, 1st Class to Mikus for his contributions to the country. Jozef Mikus was employed with the Foreign Ministry during the Tiso regime and fled the country after the war to escape imprisonment.

In January a Jewish cemetery in Banovce nad Bebravou was desecrated and 35 tombs were destroyed. This was the fourth such attack on the Jewish Cemetery located in the birthplace of the wartime President Jozef Tiso. Some of the vandals were immediately taken into custody but received suspended sentences of 4 to 7 months in prison and a fine of up to \$3,439 (SKK 135,000) in view of the fact that they were minors.

The Jewish community continues to complain that a lawsuit against Martin Savel, a former editor of the publishing house Agres who published anti-Semitic literature and the anti-Jewish magazine Voice of Slovakia in the early 1990s, never has been resolved due to the slowness of the courts.

The Catholic Church's plans to canonize Bishop Vojtasak were stalled by repeated protests worldwide from Jewish and civic organizations, particularly UZZNO. Vojtasak was a member of Parliament in the wartime pro-Nazi State and was aware of the deportations of Jews to Nazi concentration camps.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy maintains contacts with a broad spectrum of religious groups. The Embassy encourages tolerance for minority religions.

Embassy officers and official visitors meet with officials of the major religious groups on a regular basis to discuss property restitution issues as well as human rights conditions. Relations with religious groups are friendly and open. The Embassy continued its dialog with the Conference of Bishops, the Federation of Jewish Communities, and the Orthodox Church. The Embassy has good relations with the Ministry of Culture and has fostered an effective dialog between religious groups, the Ministry, and the Commission for the Preservation of U.S. Heritage Abroad on matters of importance to the Commission.

The Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission actively lobbied members of the Government to expedite the work of the Joint Commission on resolving the questions of heirless property taken from Holocaust victims. This work was successfully concluded during the reporting period.

Embassy officers have played an active role in assisting in restitution cases involving U.S. citizens and have assisted the Government in its attempts to become a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research and to initiate a liaison project on Holocaust education in cooperation with the Task Force. The Public Affairs Section has continued to be active in perpetuating this successful project.

SLOVENIA

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 7,827 square miles, and its population is approximately 1,964,036. Estimates of religious identification vary. According to the 2002 census, the numbers are: Roman Catholic, 1,135,626; Evangelical, 14,736; Other Protestant, 1,399; Orthodox, 45,908; Other Christian, 1,877; Islam, 47,488; Jewish, 99; Oriental, 1,026; other religion, 558; Agnostic, 271; Believer, but belongs to no religion, 68,714; Unbeliever/atheist, 199,264; Did not want to reply, 307,973; Unknown, 139,097.

The Orthodox and Muslim populations appear to correspond to the country's immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively. These groups tend to have a lower socioeconomic status in society.

Foreign missionaries, including a mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and other religious groups (including Hare Krishna, Scientology, and Unification organizations) operate without hindrance.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There are no formal requirements for recognition as a religion by the Government. If they wish to be recognized as legal entities, religious communities must register with the Government's Office for Religious Communities. By the end of the reporting period, no groups were denied registration; however, no new groups have successfully completed the registration process since the Office's current Director assumed his duties in 2000. The Human Rights Ombudsman is investigating formal complaints from several smaller religious communities that their applications for registration have gone without response for over a year. The Office for Religious Communities is working on a new draft law on religious communities, with input from interested groups, which would establish clearly defined registration procedures and requirements. Some groups have expressed concern that certain language under consideration including a minimum membership requirement of 100 persons and a legally distinct status for autochthonous religions could be discriminatory.

In 1999 the Government signed an agreement regarding the legal position of the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia with the Bishop's Conference and concluded a similar agreement in 2000 with the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia. Other religious communities have expressed interest in negotiating similar agreements with the Government. In December 2001, the Government concluded an Agreement on Legal Questions with The Holy See.

Religious groups, including foreign missionaries, must register with the Ministry of the Interior if they wish to receive value-added tax rebates on a quarterly basis. All groups in the country report equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

The appropriate role for religious instruction in schools continues to be an issue of debate. The Constitution states that parents are entitled to give their children "a moral and religious upbringing." Only those schools supported by religious bodies teach religion.

In May 2002, the Law on Defense was amended to include a provision specifically providing military personnel with the right to religious services and creating a chaplain corps to provide services in the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Muslim faiths. As of June 30, one Protestant and three Catholic Chaplains were employed by the Slovenian Armed Forces under the Law's provisions.

The Roman Catholic Church was a major property holder in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II. After the war, much church property—churches and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests—was confiscated and nationalized by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. After Slovenian independence in 1991, Parliament passed legislation calling for denationalization (restitution or compensation) within a fixed period. Despite the Catholic Church's numerical predominance, restitution of its property remains a politically unpopular issue. In July 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture issued a decree returning approximately 20,396 acres of forests in Triglav National Park to the Church; however, in May 2002, this decree was annulled by the Ljubljana Administrative Court in response to multiple legal challenges.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, it has been Government policy since 1991 to pay the share of social insurance contribution for clergy and other full time religious workers that is normally paid by an employer. The Human Rights Ombudsman is investigating complaints from several smaller religious communities that they do not receive this benefit.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

On October 14, 2002, two plainclothes police officers arrested Amela Djogic, the wife of Mufti Osman Djogic, for failing to produce proper identification documents when requested to do so. She was released with a fine and an official warning once her husband brought her passport to the police station. The Djogics accused authorities of singling her out for such treatment because she was wearing a headscarf. After investigating the issue, a special police commission concluded on November 5 that the officers acted improperly. New guidelines for police identification procedures were implemented and all officers immediately were informed of new conduct regulations. The incident received considerable media attention and prompted other members of the Muslim community to come forward with stories of similar experi-

ences. However, the Mufti now reports that the problem appears to have been adequately addressed. It is generally believed that the officers involved were acting upon an ethnic rather than a religious stereotype.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Societal attitudes toward religion are complex. Historical events dating long before the country's independence color societal perceptions regarding the dominant Catholic Church. Much of the gulf between the (at least nominally) Catholic center-right and the largely agnostic or atheistic left stems from the massacre of large numbers of alleged Nazi and Fascist collaborators in the years 1946–48. Many of the so-called collaborators were successful businessmen whose assets were confiscated after they were killed or driven from the country, and many were prominent Catholics. Societal attitudes towards the minority Muslim and Serb Orthodox communities generally are tolerant; however, some persons fear the possible emergence of Muslim fundamentalism.

Interfaith relations are generally amicable, although there is little warmth between the majority Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups, such as the Mormons, which are viewed as aggressive proselytizers.

While there are no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom of worship, services commonly are held in private homes under cramped conditions. The community has conceptual plans to build a new facility in Ljubljana. In 2001 the Ljubljana Municipality Council selected one of five potential sites that the city had previously identified for the facility, and tasked the city's planning department to begin preparing the materials necessary to move ahead with the project. As of June 30, nothing had been put forward to the Council by the planning department. Several other religious communities have expressed concerns about excessive delays and/or a lack of transparency in municipal permitting processes.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy has held extensive discussions with the Government on the topic of property denationalization in the context of the rule of law, although it has not discussed specifically church property during these sessions. In addition, the Embassy has made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project. The Embassy meets with members of all major religious communities, representatives of non-governmental organizations that address religious freedom issues, and government officials from relevant offices and ministries.

SPAIN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. There is no state religion; however, the Catholic Church enjoys some privileges unavailable to other faiths.

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 194,897 square miles, and its population is approximately 41 million.

According to 1998 statistics collected by the Roman Catholic Church, 93.63 percent of citizens are Roman Catholic. This figure is drawn in part from records of events such as baptisms, first communions, and weddings; the number of self-de-

scribed Catholics is lower. A survey published in February 2002 by the Center for Sociological Investigations found that 82.1 percent of citizens consider themselves Catholic, of whom 19 percent attend Mass regularly. Two percent are followers of other religions; 10.2 percent are nonbelievers or agnostics; and 4.4 percent are atheists. The Federation of Evangelical Religious Entities (FEREDE) represents 350,000 Spanish Protestants, but estimates that there are 800,000 foreign Protestants, mostly European, who reside in the country at least 6 months of each year. The Federation of Spanish Islamic Entities (FEERI) estimates that there are close to 1 million Muslims, including both legal and illegal immigrants. Approximately 50,000 Jews attend religious services. There are approximately 9,000 practicing Buddhists.

In May 2002, the Register of Religious Entities listed 11,706 entities created by the Catholic Church, as well as 1,188 non-Catholic churches, confessions, and communities in the register, including 604 Protestant church entities. Protestant entities include 89 Charismatic churches, 120 Assemblies of Brothers, 213 Baptist churches, 64 Pentecostal churches, 36 Presbyterian churches, 1 Evangelical Church of Philadelphia, 9 Church of Christ churches, 1 Salvation Army entity, 17 Anglican churches, 60 interdenominational churches, 25 Churches for Attention to Foreigners, 3 Seventh-day Adventist churches, and 106 other evangelical churches. In addition, there are also 5 Orthodox entities, 3 Christian Scientist entities, 1 entity of Jehovah's Witnesses, 1 entity of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 1 entity of the Unification Church, 10 entities of other Christian confessions, 15 entities of Judaism, 159 entities of Islam, 2 entities of the Baha'i Faith, 3 entities of Hinduism, 13 entities of Buddhism, and 3 entities of other confessions.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs is illegal.

The Constitution, which declares the country to be a secular state, and various laws provide that no religion should have the character of a state religion. However, the Government treats religions in different ways. Catholicism is the dominant religion, and enjoys the closest official relationship with the Government as well as financial support. The relationship is defined by four 1979 accords between the country and the Holy See, covering economic, religious education, military, and judicial matters. Jews, Muslims, and Protestants have official status through bilateral agreements, but enjoy fewer privileges. Other recognized religions, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons, are covered by constitutional protections but have no special agreements with the Government.

Among the various benefits enjoyed by the Catholic Church is financing through the tax system. A box on the income tax form permits taxpayers to assign approximately 0.5 percent of their taxes to the Catholic Church. The State ensures a minimum level of financing regardless of taxpayer contributions. Direct payments in 2001 amounted to approximately \$120 million (21,746 million pesetas), not including state funding for religion teachers in public schools, military and hospital chaplains, and other indirect assistance.

The Organic 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 General Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice, which is updated regularly. To register with the Ministry of Justice, religious groups must submit documentation supporting their claim to be religions. If a group's application is rejected, it may appeal the decision to the courts. If it is judged not to be a religion, it may be included on a Register of Associations maintained by the Ministry of Interior. Inclusion on the Register of Associations grants legal status as authorized by the law regulating the right of association. Religions not officially recognized, such as the Church of Scientology, are treated as cultural associations.

The Catholic Church does not have to register with the Ministry of Justice's religious entities list; however, some Catholic entities do register for financial or other reasons. 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, confessions, and communities that have an agreement on cooperation with the State. Agreements on cooperation with the State have been signed by three organizations on behalf of Protestants, Jews, and Muslims; the organizations were the Federation of Evangelical Entities of Spain (FEREDE), the Fed-

eration of Israelite Communities of Spain (FCIE), and the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE).

Leaders of the Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish communities report that they continue to press the Government for comparable privileges to those enjoyed by the Catholic Church. Their list of concerns includes public financing, expanded tax exemptions, improved media access, removal of Catholic symbols from some official military acts, and fewer restrictions on opening new places of worship. Minority religious groups sometimes have difficulty navigating city requirements such as municipal building codes to open storefront places of worship. Protestant and Muslim leaders also called for the Government to provide more support for public religious education in their respective faiths.

Religion courses are offered in public schools but are not mandatory. The Catholic Church and other religious entities support religious schools.

Foreign and national missionaries proselytize without restriction.

National religious holidays include Epiphany (January 6), Holy Thursday and Good Friday, Assumption (August 15), All Saints Day (November 1), Immaculate Conception (December 8), and Christmas (December 25); some communities celebrate local religious holidays. National religious holidays do not have a negative impact on other religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Islamic federation (FEERI) reported that the building permit process for new mosque construction can be difficult and lengthy, especially for building sites in central urban locations. According to FEERI, new mosque construction sometimes is forced into less-visible suburban areas, primarily due to resistance from neighborhood groups. However, in 2003 the construction of a large and prominent mosque was completed in Granada.

FEERI noted that the Government has been very supportive of female Muslim students who face problems with school dress codes because of their use of headscarves. The Government has consistently held that the right of education takes priority over the enforcement of clothing regulations.

The State 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 report that there are no military regulations to implement the 1992 agreements. Muslim leaders report that prison officials generally provide access for imams to visit Muslim prisoners, but officials have not granted permission for imams to hold religious services on prison grounds.

In December 2001, a Madrid court acquitted 15 persons of charges of illicit association and tax evasion. The charges arose from a fraud complaint against Church of Scientology offices Dianetica and Narconon and the subsequent arrest of Scientology International President Heber Jentzsch and 71 others at a 1988 convention in Madrid. Scientology representatives asserted that the indictment against Jentzsch, who was not part of the trial, was religiously based; officials denied this assertion. At the prosecutor's recommendation, the court dismissed the case against Jentzsch in April 2002.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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 relationships among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The growth of the country's immigrant population at times has led to social friction, which in isolated instances has had a religious component. Many citizens place blame on recent Moroccan immigrants for increased crime rates in the country. These beliefs sometimes result in anti-Muslim sentiment.

In May 2002, arsonists burned an evangelical church in the town of Arganda del Rey, in the Madrid Autonomous Community. The church, whose congregation was predominantly Romanian, previously had been vandalized with anti-immigrant graf-

fiti. Police arrested four youths, who according to the local mayor were associated with an ultra-right group.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. Embassy officials also meet with religious leaders of various denominations.

SWEDEN

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 173,732 square miles, and its population is an estimated 8.9 million. Approximately 81 percent of the population belong to the Church of Sweden. It is possible to leave the Church of Sweden, and an increasing number of persons do. In 1999 when the Church and the State separated, 33,299 persons left the Church of Sweden, more than twice as many as in the previous years. The number decreased somewhat in 2000, and increased to a record high 53,702 in 2001. In 2002 44,760 persons left the Church of Sweden.

There are approximately 150,000 Roman Catholics. The Orthodox Church has approximately 100,000 members, and the main national Orthodox churches are Greek, Serbian, Syrian, Romanian, and Macedonian. There also is a large Finnish-speaking Lutheran denomination. While weekly services in Christian houses of worship generally are poorly attended, a large number of persons observe major festivals of the ecclesiastical year and prefer a religious ceremony to mark the turning points of life.

Approximately 70 percent of children are baptized, 40 percent of all those eligible are confirmed, and 90 percent of funeral services are performed under the auspices of the Church of Sweden. Approximately 60 percent of couples marrying choose a Church of Sweden ceremony.

There are a relatively large number of smaller church bodies. Several are offshoots of 19th century revival movements in the Church of Sweden. Others, such as the Baptist Union of Sweden and the Methodist Church of Sweden, trace their roots to British and North American revival movements.

The Jewish community has 10,000 active, practicing members; however, the total number of Jews living in the country is estimated to be approximately 20,000. There are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewish synagogues. Large numbers of Jews attend high holiday services but attendance at weekly services is low. The exact number of Muslims is difficult to estimate; however, it has increased rapidly in the past several years. The number provided by the Muslim community is approximately 350,000 members, of whom around 100,000 are active. Muslim affiliations are represented among immigrant groups are predominantly with the Shi'a and Sunni branches of Islam. There are mosques in many parts of the country. Buddhists and Hindus number approximately 3,000 to 4,000 persons each. Although no reliable statistics are available, it is estimated that 15 to 20 percent of the adult population are atheist.

The major religious communities and the Church of Sweden are spread across the country. Large numbers of immigrants in recent decades have led to the introduction of nontraditional religions in those communities populated by immigrants.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and other foreign missionary groups are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The rights and freedoms enumerated in the Constitution include freedom of worship, protection from compulsion to make known one's religious views, and protection from compulsion to belong to a religious community.

The country maintained a state (Lutheran) church for several hundred years, supported by a general "church tax," although the Government routinely granted any request by a taxpayer for exemption from the tax. In 1995 after decades of discussion, the Church of Sweden and the Government agreed to a formal separation. The separation came into effect in 2000. All churches of all faiths now receive state financial support.

Foreign missionary groups do not face special requirements.

Religious education is part of an overall schedule of compulsory course work in public schools.

The law permitted official institutions, such as government ministries and Parliament, to provide the public with copies of documents that are filed with the institutions, although such documents may be unpublished and protected by copyright law. For example, unpublished documents belonging to the Church of Scientology had been made available to the public. In February 2000, a new law was enacted that eliminated the former contradiction between the Constitution's freedom of information provisions and the Government's international obligations to protect unpublished copyrighted works. The new legislation states that the freedom of information does not apply when it can be assumed that the copyright holder does not wish his/her work to be made public.

The Office of the Ombudsman Against Ethnic Discrimination investigates claims by individuals or groups of discrimination "due to race, skin color, national or ethnic origin, or religion." For many years the Government has supported the activities of groups working to combat anti-Semitism. In 1998 the Government began a national Holocaust education project after a public opinion poll found that a low percentage of school children had even basic knowledge about the Holocaust. Approximately one million copies of the education project's core textbook (available at no cost to every household with children, including in the most prevalent immigrant languages) are in circulation. The Government initiated an intergovernmental multinational Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, to combat anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance by reinforcing efforts to educate about the Holocaust with international political support. Eight other countries, including the United States, are members of the Task Force.

The Living History Forum, commissioned by the Government to promote work with democracy, tolerance and human rights, was inaugurated on June 1.

In June the Ombudsman Against Ethnic Discrimination brought a case to court on behalf of a woman who was denied work because she wanted to cover her head. A sentence was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In October 2001, a new law became effective that regulates the circumcision of boys. The law stipulates that the circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, on boys under the age of 2 months, a person certified by the National Board of Health. Approximately 3,000 Muslim boys and 40 to 50 Jewish boys are circumcised each year. The National Board of Health has certified the Jewish mohels to carry out the operations, but they must be accompanied by a medical doctor or a nurse for anesthesia. The Jewish community has protested against the law on the grounds that it interferes with their religious traditions. The new law is scheduled to be evaluated in 3 years.

The Government promotes interfaith understanding and meets annually with representatives from various religious groups. The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities (SST) is a government body that cooperates with the Swedish Free Church Council. Religious bodies select SST members, who are entitled to some form of state financial assistance.

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 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.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Citizens are tolerant of diverse religious practitioners, including Mormons and Scientologists. However, some anti-Semitism exists, which occasionally takes the form of vandalism or assault. The numbers of reported anti-Semitic crimes and tendencies have increased over the past several years, reportedly due in part to the growing tension in the Middle East. In April 2002, Jewish leaders sent an open letter to the largest national daily, *Dagens Nyheter*, accusing the press of bias against Israel and of encouraging anti-Semitism. Specific anti-Semitic incidents include the throwing of feces at the window of a synagogue in Malmo in October 2002, and an attempted arson at the purification room of the Jewish cemetery in Malmo in April. Hours before this incident, the Malmo mosque was burnt to the ground; a Star of David was painted on a mosque wall. Police found no evidence of a connection between the attacks.

Since 2001 threats against the Muslim community have increased. In April the Islamic school and large parts of the Islamic center in Malmo were destroyed by arson. The firemen were able to save the Mosque. Several mosques received bomb threats, and a Muslim school in the western suburbs was firebombed in September 2001. By the end of the reporting period, the investigation of this crime was ongoing.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. The U.S. Government had criticized the law that made unpublished Scientology documents public.

SWITZERLAND

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

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

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

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 15,941 square miles, and its population is an estimated 7.21 million. Three quarters of the population nominally adhere to either the Catholic or the Protestant Church, the two predominant denominations, but actual church attendance rates are much lower. The Muslim population is the largest religious minority, making up approximately 4 percent of the resident population. Over 11 percent of citizens claim no formal allegiance to any church or religious community at all.

The breakdown between the different religious denominations has shifted noticeably over the past several years. Traditionally, over 95 percent of the population has been evenly split between the Protestant and the Catholic Church, but since the 1970s, there has been a steady increase of persons formally renouncing their church membership. In the Catholic Church, immigration from southern Europe has countervailed this trend. The arrival of immigrants from other parts has contributed to the noticeable growth of religious communities, which in the past had no or no strong presence in the country. According to the Federal Government's Statistics Office, membership in religious denominations is as follows: 41.8 percent Roman Catholic, 33.0 percent Protestant, 1.8 percent Orthodox, 0.2 percent Old Catholic, and 0.2 percent other Christian groups; 4.3 percent Muslim, 0.2 percent Jewish, and

0.8 percent other religions (Buddhist, Hindi, and other); 11.1 percent no formal creed.

The Muslim population has doubled to more than 310,000 over the past several years, due to the influx of refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Although only two mosques exist—in Zurich and Geneva—there are approximately 120 Islamic centers throughout the country, making Muslims the country's largest non-Christian minority.

Groups such as Young Life, Youth for Christ, the Church of Scientology, Youth With a Mission, the Salvation Army, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and the Islamic Call are active in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

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

The Constitution grants freedom of creed and conscience and the Federal Criminal Code prohibits any form of debasement or discrimination of any religion or of any religious adherents.

There is no official state church. However, all of the 26 cantons (states) financially support at least one of the three traditional denominations—Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, or Protestant—with funds collected through taxation. Each canton has its own regulations regarding the relationship between church and state. In some cantons, the church tax is voluntary but in others an individual who chooses not to contribute to church tax may formally have to leave the church. In some cantons private companies are unable to avoid payment of the church tax. Some cantons grant “church taxation” status, which the traditional three Christian denominations enjoy, to the Jewish community. In March the Zurich cantonal parliament adopted an amendment to the cantonal constitution that would provide for the recognition of non-traditional religious communities and allow them to levy a tax on their members and to receive public funds. The amendment is expected to be put to a cantonal referendum by the end of 2003. A religious organization must register with the Government in order to receive tax-exempt status.

Groups of foreign origin are free to proselytize. Foreign missionaries must obtain a “religious worker” visa to work in the country. Requirements include proof that the foreigner would not displace a citizen from doing the job, that the foreigner would be supported financially by the host organization, and that the country of origin of religious workers also grants visas to Swiss religious workers. Youth “interns” may qualify for special visas as well.

Religion is taught in public schools. The doctrine presented depends on which religion predominates in the particular canton. However, those of different faiths are free to attend classes for their own creeds during the class period. Atheists are not required to attend the classes. Parents also may send their children to private schools or teach their children at home.

The debate over the country's World War II record contributed to the problem of anti-Semitism (see Section III). The Federal Council took action to address the problem of anti-Semitism. The Federal Department of the Interior has set up a Federal Service for the Combating of Racism to coordinate anti-racism activities of the Federal Administration with cantonal and communal authorities. This Federal Service, which began operating at the beginning of 2002, has a budget of \$10.8 million (15 million Swiss francs) to use over a 5-year period. Of this money, \$360,000 (500,000 Swiss francs) per year was reserved for the establishment of new local consultation centers where victims of racial or religious discrimination may seek assistance. Approximately 130 of these consultation centers or contact points already exist in the country. In addition, the Federal Service for the Combating of Racism sponsors and manages a variety of projects to combat racism, including some projects specifically addressing the problem of anti-Semitism.

In 1999 The Federal Council (Cabinet) announced the creation of a Center for Tolerance, but the project was abandoned during the period covered by this report after they could not secure financing from the public and private sector. The Center hoped to produce curricula material to address the roots of racism, provide exhibits designed to teach historical lessons, offer academic research opportunities, and host international symposia. The association held its first symposium “Bern-Discussion for Tolerance” in November 2001 in a hotel in Bern.

In April 2002, the representatives of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim religious communities constituted an association for the creation of a "House of Religions" in Bern. The project organizers envision the house as a meeting place to foster dialog among the different religious communities. The organizers presented a feasibility study in December 2002, and held a conference with more than 60 representatives of the different communities in March. The financing for the project has not yet been assured; total cost to establish the House of Religions are estimated to run up to \$9 million (12 million Swiss francs).

The Government does not initiate interfaith activities.

Of the country's 16 largest political parties, only 3—the Evangelical People's Party, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Christian Social Party—subscribe to a religious philosophy. There have been no reports of individuals being excluded from a political party because of their religious beliefs. Some groups have organized their own parties, such as the Transcendental Meditation Maharishi's Party of Nature and the Argentinean Guru's Humanistic Party. However, none of these have gained enough of a following to win political representation.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

In 1999 the Church of Scientology failed in the country's highest court to overturn a municipal law in Basel that barred persons from being approached on the street by those using "deceptive or dishonest methods." The Court ruled that the law, prompted by efforts to curb Scientology, involved an intervention in religious freedom but did not infringe on it.

The city of Buchs, St. Gallen, also has passed a law modeled on the Basel law. However, it is still legal to proselytize in nonintrusive ways, such as through public speaking on the street or by going door-to-door in neighborhoods.

Through several court cases between 1995 and 2000 the Federal Court consistently ruled the Church of Scientology as a primarily commercial, rather than religious, entity.

On April 28, the Federal Court (Supreme Court) ruled that it was constitutional to refuse a license to run a private school to a body affiliated with the Church of Scientology, because of the church's controversial nature, a stance the Court had already taken previously in 1993 and 1996. In a unanimous decision, the Court noted that mandatory schooling was a constitutional duty of the cantons and that each canton may reserve licenses to private parties that can be fully expected to discharge this public duty; neither the constitutional provisions on economic freedom, religious freedom, nor the freedom of assembly grant an absolute right to run a private school for children of mandatory schooling age. The Federal Court thus upheld a decision of the Lucerne cantonal government to close a private primary school run by a woman formally associated with the Church of Scientology. The Lucerne Educational Board in 1998 authorized the woman to start the school but the cantonal government revoked the license 1 year later. In November 2002, the cantonal Administrative Court threw out an appeal on the grounds that the woman could not be entrusted with the education of children of mandatory schooling age because of her personal and financial links to the Church of Scientology. The woman appealed to the Federal Court, which ruled against her. The school remained open pending a final verdict but is expected to close once the pupils have been placed in other schools.

On February 5, the Geneva Cantonal Government confirmed its decision to fire public school teacher Hani Ramadan, a Muslim cleric, after hearing his views. Ramadan had been suspended from teaching since October 2002 following the publication of an article in the French newspaper *Le Monde* in September 2002, in which he came out in favor of the stoning of adulterers as set out in Shari'a law. The Cantonal president publicly stated that the justification of stoning ran counter to the values of the Geneva republic, adding that Ramadan twice had been clearly warned in writing in previous years. Geneva has strict laws separating church and state, which restrict cantonal employees; ability to express personal views in an official setting. In an administrative investigation commissioned by the Geneva authorities, the former Geneva cantonal prosecutor-general concluded in December 2002 that Ramadan had violated the terms of his employment and that his clerical functions as Director of the Islamic Center of Geneva were incompatible with the separation of Church and State. Ramadan decided to appeal the decision.

In October 2002, the immigration authorities of the Canton of Valais refused to grant a residency permit to the Macedonian Imam Sevgani Asanoski on the grounds that his religious education was too radical and potentially endangered the religious peace among different Muslim communities in the country. An advisory body on immigration of the Federal Government had positively reviewed Asanoski's application for residency permit to serve as Imam of the Islamic Center of Sion, but cantonal

authorities decide autonomously against it. Asanoski appealed the decision of the Valais immigration authorities to the Valais cantonal government, but the latter rejected the appeal in May. Asanoski has not appealed the Valais government decision.

In January 2002, the City of Zurich decided to establish a Muslim cemetery, ending a decade-long struggle of local Muslim organizations for a place to bury their members. In October 2002, the Zurich City Council opened a credit line of \$1.3 million (1.8 million Swiss francs) and construction of the Muslim cemetery adjacent to an existing public cemetery in a Zurich suburb was underway at the end of the period covered by this report. It offers space for a few hundred graves and meets Muslim religious requirements. Muslim congregations also may use the existing infrastructure of the cemetery to perform rituals. Muslim cemeteries already exist in Geneva, Bern, and Basel.

In February 2002, the European Court of Human Rights upheld the Canton of Geneva's legal prohibition of a Muslim primary school teacher from wearing a headscarf in the classroom. The Court ruled that the Geneva regulations do not violate the articles on religious freedom and nondiscrimination of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court found that the legal provisions did not discriminate against the religious convictions of the complainant, but were meant to protect the rights of other subjects as well as the public order.

On December 9, 2002, the Government sent a draft animal rights bill to Parliament that upholds the existing ban on ritual slaughter, but explicitly allows for the import of kosher and halal meat. Ritual slaughter (the bleeding to death of animals that have not been stunned first) has been banned in the country since 1893. The Government in an earlier draft proposed to lift the ban on ritual slaughter, which it considered an infringement of the freedom of religious minorities, but in March 2002 backed down after the proposal provoked a wave of opposition from animal right and consumer groups, veterinary surgeons, and farmers, arguing that the practice inflicted undue suffering on animals. The Government decided to maintain the ban in the interest of religious peace after consulting with Jewish organizations. Kosher and halal meat generally is already readily available in the country at comparable prices.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

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

According to the 2001 Swiss National Security Report, as of December 2001, there had been 183 cases brought to court under the 1995 antiracism law, with 83 convictions. Of those, 43 were convicted for racist oral or written slurs, 19 persons for anti-Semitism, 17 for revisionism, and 4 for other reasons.

On May 22, 2002, a Vevey district court sentenced three revisionists—Gaston-Armand Amaudruz, Philippe Georges Brennenstuhl, and Rene-Louis Berclaz—to prison terms of 3 and, in Berclaz's case, 8 months for racial discrimination. All men were found guilty of writing and distributing two books that outlined their revisionist and anti-Semitic views to the general public. Only Brennenstuhl was present at the court ruling. He declined to answer the court's questions and built his case on the constitutional right to free speech.

Jewish groups report that their members are more frequently subject to anti-Semitic criticism; on April 28, unknown persons spray painted anti-Semitic slogans on the Lausanne synagogue, causing minor damage. There were no other reports of any anti-Semitic incidents during the period covered by this report. The Federal Commission Against Racism (EKR) has met with the Swiss Federation of Jewish communities (SIG) to discuss the intensification of the Middle East conflict and its impact on Jewish persons in the country. EKR and SIG agreed that criticism of Israeli policy does not in itself amount to anti-Semitism, but could foster anti-Semitic attitudes.

In 2000 a Geneva research group released a survey in cooperation with the American Jewish Committee in New York, stating that anti-Semitic views are held by 16 percent of citizens. Other prominent survey firms, as well as some Jewish leaders, disputed the accuracy of the Geneva firm's survey, stating that the survey overestimated the prevalence of anti-Semitic views. According to the survey, 33 percent

of Swiss People's Party (SVP) supporters voiced anti-Semitic views. However, the survey found that 92 percent of all Swiss youth rejected anti-Semitic notions. The survey reflected some inconsistencies. For example, during the recent period of controversy over the country's World War II record, public opinion in support of the country's antiracism laws actually strengthened.

There have been no reports of difficulties in Muslims buying or renting space to worship. Although occasional complaints arise, such as a Muslim employee not being given time to pray during the workday, attitudes generally are tolerant toward Muslims.

Many nongovernmental organizations coordinate interfaith events throughout the country.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The U.S. Embassy discusses religious freedom issues with both government officials and representatives of the various faiths.

TAJIKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Government policies reflect a pervasive fear of Islamic fundamentalism, a fear shared by much of the general population. The Government monitors the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political. Members of the organization Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Emancipation), an extremist Islamic organization, were subject to arrest and imprisonment for subversion. Beginning in 2002, northern regional authorities closed several mosques and removed 15 imams from their posts. The Government, including President Imomali Rahmonov, continued to enunciate a policy of active secularism, which it tends to define in antireligious rather than nonreligious terms.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom; however, some religious minority groups experienced local harassment during the period covered by this report. Some mainstream Muslim leaders occasionally expressed concern that minority religious groups undermine national unity.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 55,300 square miles, and its population is approximately 6.7 million. An estimated 95 percent of citizens consider themselves Muslims, although the degree of religious observance varies widely. Only an estimated 10 to 15 percent regularly follow Muslim practices (such as daily prayer and dietary restrictions) or attend services at mosques. The number of Muslims who fast during the holy month of Ramadan is high; up to 99 percent of Muslims in the countryside and more than 66 percent in the cities fasted during the latest month of Ramadan. Approximately 7 percent of all Muslims are Shi'a, 40 percent of whom are Ismailis. Most of them reside in the remote Gorno-Badakhshan region as well as certain districts of the southern Khatlon region and in Dushanbe. Most of the rest of the Muslim inhabitants (approximately 90 percent) are Sunni.

There are approximately 230,000 Christians, mostly ethnic Russians and other Soviet-era immigrant groups. The largest Christian group is Russian Orthodox, but there also are registered organizations of Baptists (five), Roman Catholics (two), Seventh-day Adventists (one), Korean Protestants (two—another church registered earlier this year), Jehovah's Witnesses (one), and Lutherans (no data on registration). Other religious minorities are very small and include Baha'is (four registered organizations), Zoroastrians (no data on registered organizations), Hare Krishna (one registered organization), and Jews (one registered organization). Each of these groups probably totals less than 1 percent of the population. The overwhelming majority of these groups live in the capital or other large cities.

Christian missionaries from Western countries, Korea, India, and other countries are present, but their numbers are quite small. The number of Christian converts

since independence is estimated to be approximately 2,000 persons. Some small groups of Islamic missionaries from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern states also visited the country during the period covered by this report.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, there are some restrictions, and the Government monitors the activities of religious institutions to keep them from becoming overtly political. Members of the organization Hizb ut-Tahrir were subject to arrest and imprisonment for subversion.

According to the Law on Religion and Religious Organizations, religious communities must be registered by the State Committee on Religious Affairs (SCRA), which is under the Council of Ministers and monitors the activities of Muslim groups, the Russian Orthodox Church, and other religious establishments. While the official reason given to justify registration is to ensure that religious groups act in accordance with the law, the practical purpose is to ensure that they do not become overtly political. To register with the SCRA, a national religious group must submit a charter, a list of at least 10 members, and evidence of local government approval of the location of a house of worship, if one exists. Religious groups are not required to have a physical structure in order to register but cannot hold regular meetings without one. Individual believers—up to 10 persons—do not have to register with the SCRA in order to worship privately.

Responsibility for registration of neighborhood mosques is divided between the SCRA and local authorities, who must agree on the physical location of a given mosque. The SCRA is the primary authority for registration of non-Muslim groups; however, local communities of these religious groups must also register with local authorities. According to the SCRA, local authorities may only object to the registration of a place of worship if the proposed structure is not in accordance with sanitation or building codes, located on public land, or immediately adjacent to government buildings, schools, or other places of worship. If the local government objects to a proposal, it is required to suggest an alternative. In the absence of registration, local authorities can force the closure of a place of worship and members can be administratively fined. There were no cases of SCRA refusal to register religious groups during the period covered by this report, nor were there reports of groups that did not apply for registration out of a belief that it would not be granted. However, there were some cases of local government refusal to register religious groups in their areas, as well as closures of unregistered mosques.

The Council of Islamic Scholars, technically a nongovernmental body, governs Islamic theology and education in the country and approves appointments of imams; however, the Council's charter and membership are subject to SCRA approval. Some prominent religious figures have reportedly voiced disapproval with the quality of religious education implemented by the Council.

More than 3,500 mosques were estimated to be open for daily prayers; 2,755 of these mosques were registered as of June. So-called "Friday mosques" (large facilities built for Friday prayers) must be registered with the SCRA. There were 247 mosques registered, not including Ismaili places of worship because complete data were unavailable. Only one such mosque is authorized per 15,000 residents in a given geographic area. Many observers contend that this is discriminatory because no such rule exists for other faiths.

Regularly throughout the period covered by this report, President Rahmonov strongly defended "secularism," which in the country's political context is a highly politicized term that carries the strong connotation—likely understood both by the President and his audience—of being "antireligious" rather than "nonreligious." The President also occasionally criticized Islam as a political threat. In a July 2002 speech in the northern Isfara district, President Rahmonov announced that there were too many mosques in the country. While the vast majority of citizens consider themselves Muslims and are not anti-Islamic, there is a significant fear of Islamic fundamentalism among both progovernment forces and much of the population at large.

A 1999 constitutional amendment stated that the State is secular and that citizens may be members of political parties formed on a religious basis, although a 1998 law specifying that parties may not receive support from religious institutions remained in effect. Two representatives from a religiously oriented party, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT), were members in the Lower House of the National Parliament during the period covered by this report. There also were several depu-

ties from the Islamic Renaissance Party in regional and district parliaments around the country.

Although there is no official state religion, the Government has declared two Islamic holidays, Id Al-Fitr and Idi Qurbon, as state holidays.

There are small private publishers that publish Islamic materials without serious problems. There is no restriction on the distribution or possession of the Koran, the Bible, or other religious works. The IRPT continued to publish its official newspaper, Najot (founded in 1999). The party also publishes Naison, a magazine for women, and Safinai Umed, a journal targeting youth. All of these publications are printed at a private press as state-run publishing houses refuse to print IRPT materials, apparently for political reasons. The Union of Islamic Scientists of Tajikistan publishes the weekly journal Tamaddun. Privately owned mass-circulation newspapers regularly published articles explaining Islamic beliefs and practices.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government did not explicitly ban, prohibit, or discourage specific religions; however, local authorities in some cases used the registration requirement in attempts to prevent the activity of some groups. The Government has banned the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir, which has developed a significant following among the ethnic Uzbek population in the north. This movement operates underground and allegedly calls for a nonviolent overthrow of established authority and the reestablishment of government along the lines of the six "rightly guided Caliphs" of early Islamic history.

Beginning in August 2002, the Government required all mosques to reregister with local authorities and the SCRA. Approximately 750 mosques were closed for failing to comply with this requirement, although many remained open as "teahouses" or other public facilities where observant Muslims go to talk and pray. In August and September 2002, authorities in the northern Sughd region closed a number of unregistered mosques in the districts of Isfara and Jabbarasulov. Most of these mosques registered with the Government and were officially reopened; eight remained "closed," although parishioners continued to pray there. In November 2002, government officials closed one of these mosques and a madrassa in the Isfara area after the imam and his family apparently fled the village. During Ramadan, city authorities in Dushanbe informed several "teahouses" that they would need to register as mosques; officials did not restrict activities at these teahouses while the registration applications were pending.

In July and August 2002, government officials in Sughd oblast carried out an "attestation" of all imams in the region, through which all imams were tested on their knowledge of Islamic teachings and religious principles. Although the test was designed by the Council of Islamic Scholars, technically a nongovernmental body, it was approved by the SCRA, which enforced the results of the test. As a result, 15 imams were removed from their posts; 3 of the imams were members of the IRPT and were removed for that reason. Local observers alleged that the Government used the testing process as a means to silence certain politically outspoken religious figures. In Sughd oblast, mosques that registered allegedly signed an agreement declaring, "I will use our organization only for religious ends, I will not be a member of a party, and will not assist them."

In July 2002 local officials refused to register a Baha'i congregation in the northern Sughd region, but the congregation was registered after the SCRA intervened. There were no further reports of police or security officials' harassment of Baha'i community members.

There were no reports of problems such as those experienced by a Christian church in the city of Qurghanteppe (also, Kurgan-Tyube). It had problems registering with local authorities until the intervention of the SCRA and the church's registration in January 2002.

Aside from the registration and testing requirements, government officials sometimes restricted other religious activities by Muslims as well. Officials continued to enforce prohibitions against the use of loudspeakers for the 5-times-daily call to prayer in Dushanbe and certain areas of the Khatlon and Sughd regions. These prohibitions were issued by the mayors' offices in each area in 2001, but were apparently not based on any central directive. There also were reports that some local officials have forbidden members of the Islamic Renaissance Party to speak in mosques in their region. However, this restriction is more a reflection of political rather than religious differences.

There were reports that authorities subjected members of Islamic institutions and opposition to increasing pressure during the period of this report. In May the Government arrested Shamsiddin Shamsiddinov, the IRPT's Deputy Chairman for Cultural Affairs, and charged him with murder and other "grave crimes," according to

press statements by the national Military Prosecutor's office. The IRPT stated that it believed the arrest was politically motivated, although it did not allege that this was part of any government campaign against religion. At the end of the reporting period, the Government continued to hold Shamsiddinov in pretrial detention.

In May local authorities in Tursunzade, a city just outside of the capital Dushanbe, broke up a Jehovah's Witnesses gathering in one parishioner's apartment for violation of the religion law's provisions on registration and private religious education. The judge in the case fined the owner of the apartment \$17 (50 somoni) and issued an order banning any gathering of more than 2 Jehovah's Witnesses in the city unless they registered the apartment as a place of worship with the Tursunzade city government and the SCRA. At the end of the reporting period, the Supreme Court had not decided whether to hear the Jehovah's Witnesses' appeal. In November 2002, a Baptist was tried in a northern region and fined \$8 (25 somoni) after his neighbors complained that he was holding evangelical services in the courtyard of his home. He filed an appeal, which was still pending at the end of the reporting period.

Missionaries of registered religious groups legally were not restricted and proselytized openly. Missionaries are not particularly welcomed, and some religious groups experienced harassment in response to evangelical activities. The Government's fear of Islamic extremists prompted it to restrict visas for Muslim missionaries. There was evidence of an unofficial ban on foreign missionaries who were perceived as extreme Islamic fundamentalists.

An executive decree generally prohibits Government publishing houses from publishing anything in Arabic script, but they have done so in special cases. They generally do not publish religious literature, but have done so on occasion, including copies of the Koran.

The Government imposed new restrictions on pilgrims undertaking the Hajj during the period covered by this report, mandating that pilgrims travel by air. The Government stated that it made the decision because no Tajik tour operators could meet Saudi government safety and hygiene regulations for buses carrying pilgrims and in order to ensure that the possibility of armed conflict in Iraq would not put pilgrims at risk. There were no quotas on the total number or regional origin of pilgrims. A total of 3,000 Tajiks made the pilgrimage (out of a Saudi-imposed limit of 5,900), which was a drop of 2,200 compared with the previous Hajj. The increased cost of travel by air appeared to be the primary reason for the decrease in the number of pilgrims.

Authorities in Isfara continued to impose restrictions on private Arabic language schools (to include restrictions on private Islamic instruction) stemming from past reports that one such school was hosting a suspected terrorist. In addition, restrictions on home-based Islamic instruction remained in place. While these restrictions were reportedly due to political concerns, they affected religious instruction.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to detain and try on charges of subversion numerous members of Hizb ut-Tahrir in the northern, primarily ethnic Uzbek, Sughd region. These measures primarily were a reaction to the group's political agenda of replacing the Government with an Islamic caliphate. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir asserts that it intends to accomplish this by nonviolence, officials are concerned by its alleged links to terrorist organizations, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). In October 2002, a Ministry of Security official announced that 142 members of the banned party had been sentenced to varying jail terms between January and October of that year; in June a Ministry of Interior report indicated that 23 Hizb ut-Tahrir members had been arrested in the first six months of the year. Most of these persons were sentenced to between one and four years' imprisonment, but some received sentences of up to 18 years' imprisonment. There were reports of serious irregularities in trials and abuse in detention of Hizb ut-Tahrir members, although such reports were also common in other legal proceedings. In 2000, one Hizb ut-Tahrir member reportedly died in police custody.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Conflict between different religious groups virtually is unknown, in part because there are so few non-Muslims. However, some Muslim leaders occa-

sionally expressed concern that minority religious groups undermine national unity and complained that current laws and regulations give preference to religious minorities. While the vast majority of citizens consider themselves Muslims and most of the inhabitants are not anti-Islamic, there is a pervasive fear of Islamic fundamentalism among both progovernment forces and much of the population at large.

In May fires occurred in at least two mosques and the homes of two imams in the Isfara district in the northern region. Responsibility for these acts was unclear, although local authorities reportedly instructed one of the imams to tell any inquiring journalists that the fire in his house was due to an electrical short circuit. The Sughd regional fire department said in a press statement that an arson investigation was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

The small Baha'i community generally did not experience prejudice; however, two Baha'i residents of Dushanbe were shot and killed on October 23 and December 31, 2001. A police investigation determined that both men were killed because of their religion. In fall 2002, the Government arrested approximately 40 persons in connection with these killings; in November 2002, the Government formally charged 3 of these individuals with the murders, 1 of whom also was charged with the 1999 murder of a leader of Dushanbe's Baha'i community. Police alleged that the suspects killed all three men because of their religion and that they were aligned with Iran. At the end of the reporting period, a trial was still underway.

There were no reports of further discrimination such as that experienced by Hare Krishna groups in 2001.

There were no further developments connected to the October 2000 bombing of a Protestant church in Dushanbe and the subsequent trial and execution of two suspects in the case.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Through public diplomacy, the U.S. Embassy has supported programs designed to create a better understanding of how democracies address the issue of secularism and religious freedom.

TURKEY

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on religious groups and on religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities.

There was no significant change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is faced some restrictions and occasional harassment, including detentions for alleged proselytizing or unauthorized meetings. The Government continued to oppose "Islamic fundamentalism." State authorities continue their broad ban on wearing Muslim religious dress in state facilities, including universities, schools, and workplaces. Following the June 2001 closure of the Islamist-led Fazilet (Virtue) party for "antiseccular activities," two new political parties were formed. The leaders of the new parties, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Islam-influenced AK (Justice and Development) Party and former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan of the Islamist Saadet (Felicity) Party, were banned from participating in the November 2002 national elections due to past convictions for illegal speech. Following the end of their respective political bans, Erdogan entered Parliament and was appointed Prime Minister, while Erbakan assumed the formal leadership of Saadet.

The generally tolerant relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom in principle; however, a sharp debate continued over the State's definition of "secularism," the proper role of religion in society, and the potential influence of the country's small minority of Islamists. Christians, Baha'is, and some Muslims faced societal suspicion and mistrust, and more radical Islamist elements continued to express anti-Jewish sentiments. Additionally, some persons wishing to convert from Islam to another religion experienced social harassment from friends and neighbors.

The U.S. Government frequently discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 301,394 square miles, and its population is approximately 67.8 million. Approximately 99 percent of the population are Muslim, the majority of whom are Sunni. The level of religious observance varies throughout the country, in part due to the strong secularist approach of the State. In addition to the country's Sunni Muslim majority, there are an estimated 5 to 12 million Alevi, followers of a belief system that incorporates aspects of both Shi'a and Sunni Islam and draws on the traditions of other religions found in Anatolia as well. Turkish Alevi rituals include men and women worshipping together through oratory, poetry, and dance. The Government considers Alevism a heterodox Muslim sect; however, some Turkish Alevi and radical Sunnis maintain Alevi are not Muslims.

There are several other religious groups, mostly concentrated in Istanbul and other large cities. While exact membership figures are not available, these include an estimated 65,000 Armenian Orthodox Christians, 25,000 Jews, and 3,000 to 5,000 Greek Orthodox Christians. These three groups have special legal minority status under the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. There also are approximately 10,000 Bahá'ís, an estimated 15,000 Syrian Orthodox (Syriac) Christians, 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 state authorities and later under the impact of the war against the PKK insurrection, many Syriacs have migrated to Istanbul, Europe, or North America. No figures are available on the number of atheists or nonreligious persons in the country.

There are no known estimates of the number and religious affiliation of foreign missionaries in the country.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, the Government imposes some restrictions on non-Muslim religious groups and on Muslim religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities, usually for the stated reason of preserving the secular State. The Constitution establishes the country as a secular state and provides for freedom of belief, freedom of worship, and the private dissemination of religious ideas. However, these rights are restricted by other constitutional provisions regarding the integrity and existence of the secular State. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on religious grounds.

The Government oversees Muslim religious facilities and education through its Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet). The Diyanet has responsibility for regulating the operation of the country's 75,000 mosques and employing local and provincial imams, who are civil servants. Some groups, particularly Alevi, claim that the Diyanet reflects mainstream Sunni Islamic beliefs to the exclusion of other beliefs; however, the Government asserts that the Diyanet treats equally all those who request services.

A separate government agency, the General Directorate for Foundations (Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü), regulates some activities of non-Muslim religious groups and their affiliated churches, monasteries, synagogues, and related religious property. There are 160 "minority foundations" recognized by the Vakıflar, including a Greek Orthodox foundation with approximately 70 sites, an Armenian Orthodox foundation with approximately 50 sites, and a Jewish foundation with 20 sites, as well as Syrian Christian, Chaldean, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian, and Maronite foundations. The Vakıflar also regulates Muslim charitable religious foundations, including schools, hospitals, and orphanages.

In October 2002, the Government implemented a reform measure allowing, in principle, non-Muslim foundations to acquire property for the first time since 1936. The measure applies specifically to the 160 minority foundations recognized by the Vakıflar; whether the reform would also apply to other foundations remains unclear. A number of foundations criticized the application process as lengthy and burdensome, and by the end of the period covered by this report, the Vakıflar had rejected many such applications.

Some religious groups, particularly the Greek and Armenian Orthodox communities, have lost property to the State in the past or continue to fight against such losses. If a non-Muslim community does not use its property due to a decline in the size of its congregation to under 10 individuals, the Vakıflar may assume direct administration and ownership. If such groups can demonstrate a renewed community need, they may apply to recover their properties.

Government authorities do not interfere on 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 State, interfering with that religion's services, or debasing its property. However, some Christian churches have been defaced, including in the Tur Abdin area of the southeast where many ancient Syriac churches are found, and communities often have been unable to make repairs due to lack of resources. In January the Meryam Ana Kilelesi Syriac Church in Diyarbakir was robbed.

Alevis freely practice their beliefs and build "Cem houses" (places of gathering). Many Alevis allege discrimination in the State's failure to include any of their doctrines or beliefs in religious instruction classes in public schools, which reflect Sunni Muslim doctrines. They also charge a bias in the Diyanet, which views Alevis as a cultural rather than religious group; the Diyanet does not allocate specific funds for Alevi activities or religious leadership. However, some Sunni Islamic political activists charge that the State favors and is under the influence of the Alevis.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government imposes some restrictions on religious groups and on religious expression in government offices and state-run institutions, including universities.

Secularists in the military, judiciary, and other branches of the State bureaucracy continued to wage campaigns against what they label as proponents of Islamic fundamentalism. These groups view religious fundamentalism, which they do not define clearly, but which they assert is an attempt to impose the rule of Shari'a law in all civil and criminal matters, as a threat to the secular republic. The National Security Council (NSC), a powerful military and civilian body established by the 1982 Constitution to advise senior leadership on national security matters, categorizes religious fundamentalism as a threat to public safety.

According to the human rights organization Mazlum-Der, some government ministries have dismissed or barred from promotion civil servants suspected of anti-state or Islamist activities. There were credible reports that the Education Ministry has deemed that observance of Ramazan (Ramadan), which includes daytime fasting, qualifies as such an activity; some teachers allegedly have experienced harassment or reassignment to more difficult posts as a consequence. Additionally, reports by Mazlum-Der, the media, and others indicate that the military regularly dismisses religiously observant Muslims from the service. Allegedly such dismissals are based on behavior that the military believes identifies these individuals as Islamic fundamentalists, which they fear indicates disloyalty to the secular State. According to Mazlum-Der, the military has charged individuals with "lack of discipline" for activities that include performing Muslim prayers or being married to women who wear Muslim headscarves.

In November 2002, an appeals court overturned a February 2002 ruling by an administrative court to close the Union of Alevi-Bektasi Organizations (ABKB) on the grounds that it violated the Associations Law, which prohibits the establishment of associations "in the name of any religion, race, social class, religion, or sect." The case was returned to the lower court, which ruled against closure in February. In May an appeals court upheld the lower court's ruling.

Mystical Sufi religious-social orders (tarikats) have been banned officially since the 1920s. The military ranks tarikats among the most harmful threats to secularism; however, tarikats remain active and widespread. The NSC has called for stricter enforcement of the ban as part of its campaign against the perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Nevertheless, some prominent political and social leaders continue to associate with tarikats and other Islamic communities.

Under the law, religious services may take place only in designated places of worship. Municipal codes mandate that only the State can designate a place of worship, and if a religion has no legal standing in the country, it may not be eligible for a designated site. Non-Muslim religious services, especially for religious groups that do not own property recognized by the Vakiflar, often take place on diplomatic property or in private apartments. Police occasionally bar Christians from holding services in private apartments.

An August 2001 circular signed by the Ministry of Interior encouraged some provincial governors to use existing laws, such as those regulating meetings, religious building zoning, and education, to regulate gatherings of "Protestants, Baha'is, Jehovah's Witnesses, Believers in Christ" within their provinces, while "bearing in mind" those provisions of the law that provide for freedom of religion. According to one Protestant group, as well as reports by the media and other observers, local authorities asked more than a dozen churches in Istanbul and elsewhere to close. The subjected others to increased police harassment following the publication of the cir-

cular. Several Protestant groups that have engaged in religious activities, including worship, Bible study, and religious education, had charges filed against them for zoning violations. There is no official method for acquiring zoning permits for any new religious building construction. Mosques, churches, and synagogues lack official zoned status, and no group is known to have received zoning permission for the construction of a new place of worship.

Following the Constitutional Court's June 2001 closure of the Islamist Fazilet (Virtue) party for activities "contrary to the principle of the secular republic," two successor parties were formed, the Islamist Saadet Party and the AK Party. The AK Party, while conscious of the strength of Muslim tradition in Anatolia, has presented itself as a "conservative democratic" party. AK Party Chairman and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan faced immediate legal challenges to his role as founding member of the party as a result of his 1999 conviction for the crime of "inciting religious hatred." In January 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that Erdogan was ineligible to run for Parliament due to this conviction and that he could not be a founding member of the party. The court then gave the AK Party an October 2002 deadline to remove Erdogan as party chairman. When the AK Party failed to comply, prosecutors opened a case demanding the party's closure. The case continued at the end of the period covered in this report; however, under recent legal reforms a conviction would not lead to closure. Erdogan also faces possible legal charges for speeches he made in the early 1990's that allegedly contained anti-secularist statements and for alleged financial misconduct. Erdogan was elected to Parliament in by-elections held after the term of his political ban expired and subsequently was appointed Prime Minister.

Necmettin Erbakan, an Islamist former Prime Minister, was also banned from the November elections due to a past conviction for illegal speech. Erbakan assumed the Saadet chairmanship in May after his 5-year political ban expired.

In March an Ankara State Security Court postponed a verdict in the trial in absentia of Fetullah Gulen, a controversial Islamic philosopher and leader now residing in the United States. Gulen, actively supported by the State from the mid-1980s until 1997, faced 5 to 10 years imprisonment after being indicted in 2000 under the Anti-Terror Law on charges of "attempting to change the characteristics of the Republic" by trying to establish a theocratic Islamic state. The prosecutor also charged that Gulen had attempted to "infiltrate" the military. Under the postponement ruling, the case against Gulen will be closed formally if he does not commit another felony crime within 5 years.

The authorities continue to monitor the activities of Eastern Orthodox churches but generally do not interfere with their activities. The Government does not recognize the ecumenical authority of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, acknowledging him only as head of the country's Greek Orthodox community; however, the Government does not interfere with his travels or other ecumenical activities. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul continues to seek to reopen the Halki seminary on the island of Heybeli in the Sea of Marmara. The seminary has been closed since 1971, when the State nationalized all private institutions of higher learning. Under existing restrictions, religious communities largely remain unable to train new clergy in the country for eventual leadership. Coreligionists from outside the country have been permitted to assume leadership positions in some cases, but in general all religious community leaders, including Patriarchs and Chief Rabbis, must be Turkish citizens.

No law explicitly prohibits proselytizing or religious conversions; however, many prosecutors and police regard proselytizing and religious activism with suspicion, especially when such activities are deemed to have political overtones. Police occasionally bar Christians from handing out religious literature and sometimes will arrest proselytizers for disturbing the peace, "insulting Islam," conducting unauthorized educational courses, or distributing literature that has criminal or separatist elements. Courts usually dismiss such charges. In September 2002, the Erzurum State Security Court charged 12 Baha'is with "openly inciting hatred and enmity" for distributing materials on the Baha'i Faith; the charges later were dropped. 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.

State authorities continued to enforce a long-term ban on the wearing of religious head coverings at universities and by civil servants in public buildings. Women who wear head coverings and persons who actively show support for those who defy the ban have been disciplined or have lost their jobs in the public sector as nurses and teachers. Students who wear head coverings are not permitted to register for classes. Many secular Turkish women accuse Islamists of using the headscarf as a polit-

ical tool and say they fear that efforts to remove the headscarf ban will lead to pressure against women who choose not to wear a head covering.

In April the President, the chief of the military's General Staff, opposition party members, and high-ranking bureaucrats threatened to boycott a reception marking the 83rd anniversary of the founding of Parliament, because Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc's wife, who wears a Muslim headscarf, was listed on the invitation as co-host. Arinc later announced that his wife would not attend the event in an effort to avoid further tension. The incident marked the first time the event had been boycotted in 83 years. Arinc also drew sharp criticism from the secular elite in November 2002 for bringing his wife with him to the airport to see off President Sezer on a foreign trip. Some members of non-Muslim religious groups claim that they have limited career prospects in government or military service, particularly as military officers, judges, or prosecutors. A 1997 law made 8 years of secular education compulsory. Students may pursue study at Islamic Imam-Hatip high schools upon completion of 8 years in the secular public schools. Imam-Hatip schools are classified as vocational, and therefore graduates face some barriers to university admission, such as an automatic reduction in their entrance exam grades. Only the Diyanet is authorized to provide religious training, usually through the public schools, although some clandestine private religious classes do exist. Students who complete 5 years of primary school may enroll in Diyanet Koran classes on weekends and during summer vacation. Many Koran courses function unofficially. According to Mazlum-Der, police conducted approximately 20 raids of illegal Koran courses in the first 6 months of the year. Only children 12 and older legally may register for official Koran courses, and Mazlum-Der reports that many of the police raids target illegal courses for younger children.

State-sponsored Islamic religious and moral instruction in public 8-year primary schools is compulsory. Upon written verification of their non-Muslim background, religious minorities "recognized" by the Government under the 1923 Lausanne Treaty (Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Jews) are exempted by law from Muslim religious instruction. These students may attend Muslim religious courses with parental consent. Other non-Muslim minorities, such as Catholics, Protestants, and Syriac Christians, are not exempted legally; however, in practice they may obtain exemptions. The courts have ruled that all universities are public institutions and thus have an obligation to protect the country's basic principles, including "secularism." Small, peaceful protests against this policy occurred at various times during the period covered by this report, and some journalists and supporters face minor charges relating to their roles in the protests.

Some religious groups have lost property to the State in the past or continue to fight against such losses. An Armenian Orthodox church in Kirikhan, Hatay Province, faced possible expropriation when its community decreased to fewer than 10 persons. The Armenian Patriarchate won a court case allowing it to retain control of the property, but prosecutors appealed. In April an appeals court upheld the original ruling and ordered the property to be turned over to an Armenian Orthodox Church board.

In April 2002, the Baha'i community lost a legal appeal against government expropriation of a sacred site in Edirne. The Ministry of Culture had granted cultural heritage status to the site in 1993, but in January 2000, the Ministry of Education notified the Baha'i community that it had expropriated the property for future use by the adjacent primary school. At the end of the period covered by this report, members of the Baha'i community were awaiting the results of their final appeal to the Council of State.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported increasing official harassment over meeting for worship due to the fact that they are not members of an officially recognized religion. Members also have reported some difficulties in claiming conscientious objector status and exemption from required military service. Jehovah's Witnesses who are conscripted into the military refuse to take the military oath or carry weapons and have faced arrest and detention as a result; generally the detention lasts for about a month after which the individual is released pending trial. There were reports of three such cases during the period covered by this report.

Restoration or construction may be carried out in buildings and monuments considered "ancient" only with authorization of the regional board on the protection of cultural and national wealth. Bureaucratic procedures and considerations relating to historic preservation in the past have impeded repairs to religious facilities, especially in the case of Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox properties. However, according to religious leaders, the Government has become more supportive of these communities' requests. Groups are prohibited from using funds from their properties in one part of the country to support their existing population in another part of the country.

Although religious affiliation is listed on national identity cards, there is no official discrimination based upon religious persuasion. Some religious groups, such as the Baha'i Faith, allege that they are not permitted to state their religion on their cards because no category exists; they have made their concerns known to the Government. Conversion to another religion entails amending one's identification card; there are reports that those who convert from Islam to another religion have been subject to harassment by local officials when they seek amendment of their cards.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

U.S. citizen and Sufi Muslim preacher Aydogan Fuat was released following his May 2002 acquittal on charges of wearing banned religious clothing. Prosecutors appealed Fuat's acquittal, but the appeals court did not take up the case. Fuat was also acquitted on separate charges of causing religious enmity through speech.

Christian groups have encountered difficulty in organizing (especially in university settings) in Gaziantep, Eskisehir, and other cities in which they have not sought recognition as a foundation; the authorities briefly detained some Turkish and foreign Christians in these areas.

In June an Istanbul court acquitted 13 Ahmadi Muslims, members of a small religious community, who had been arrested in April 2002 and charged under Article 7 of the Anti-Terror Law for involvement with an organization "with terrorist aims." Three of the defendants remained in detention until their August 2002 hearing; the other defendants had been released on bail shortly after their arrest in April. The case was under appeal at the end of the period covered in this report.

In March an Istanbul court acquitted seven Christians charged with holding illegal church and Bible study meetings in an apartment.

In February a Protestant pastor in Diyarbakir who had been charged with "damaging a historical church" was acquitted. The pastor's own church remains closed due to zoning restrictions that prohibit the use of the property as a place of worship.

There were no other reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In June Parliament approved an amendment to the Act on Construction replacing the word "mosques" with "houses of worship," removing a legal obstacle to the building of non-Muslim religious facilities.

In October 2002, the Government implemented a reform measure allowing, in principle, non-Muslim foundations to acquire property for the first time since 1936. A number of foundations criticized the application process as lengthy and burdensome, and by the end of the period covered by this report the Vakiflar had rejected many such applications.

In May 2002, the Diyanet adopted a series of decisions after holding a 4-day conference on religious issues with attendees from the Diyanet's Supreme Council on Religious Issues and experts from theology schools. The Diyanet formally decided to: allow women to participate in the congregation for daily prayers on Fridays, during religious holidays, and funeral prayers; allow original Arabic prayers to be recited in native tongues; rule that men may not use the Koran as a premise for domestic violence; underline the fact that civil marriages (rather than religious marriages) are required by law; and state that social and legal advances for women are not against the spirit of the Koran. Some women immediately began to participate in congregations with men.

In the fall of 2001, the Diyanet issued an immediate statement condemning terrorism as a crime against humanity. The Diyanet also issued a statement, read during Friday prayers at all mosques, stressing that there is no Islamic justification for any form of terrorism. This message was reinforced during the Ramadan period at state-sponsored Iftar dinners attended by members of non-Muslim religious groups and repeated in a statement at the Diyanet-sponsored "Fifth Eurasia Islamic Council."

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Government policy and the generally tolerant relationship among religions in society contributes to religious freedom; however, some Muslims, Christians, and Baha'is face societal suspicion and mistrust. Jews and most Christian denominations freely practice their religions and report little discrimination in daily life. However, there were regular reports that citizens who convert from Islam often experience some form of social harassment or pressure from family and neighbors. Proselytizing

on behalf of non-Muslim religions is socially unacceptable. A variety of newspapers and television shows have published anti-Christian messages, including the leftist-nationalist newspaper "Aydinlik," which in May 2002 published a purported list of 40 churches in the city of Izmir that were "bribing" converts. Occasional violence against minority religious communities continued. In September 2002, two pipe bombs exploded, causing minimal damage at the Birth of St. Mary Armenian Church in Bakrkoy; the attack did not result in any casualties.

Many non-Muslim religious group members, along with many in the secular political majority of Muslims, fear the possibility of Islamic extremism and the involvement of even moderate Islam in politics. Several Islamist newspapers regularly publish anti-Semitic material.

Iftar dinners, evening events tied to the daily breaking of the Ramadan fast, often involve invitations to non-Muslim religious and secular leaders. Iftars hosted by diplomats, as well as business and religious leaders, typically include invitations to non-Muslims as a sign of openness and hospitality.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Ambassador and other Mission officials, including staff of the U.S. Consulate General in Istanbul and the U.S. Consulate in Adana, enjoy close relations with Muslim majority and other religious groups. The U.S. Embassy continues to urge the Government to re-open the Halki seminary on Heybeli Island. In October 2002, the Archons of the Order of St. Andrew, an American group that actively supports the Ecumenical Patriarchate, made its first trip to Ankara and, with the support of the Embassy, met with the Diyanet and other senior officials to urge the reopening of Halki. The Ambassador and other Embassy officers also remain in close contact with local NGOs that monitor freedom of religion.

Embassy and Consulate staff members monitor and report on incidents of detention of foreigners found proselytizing and have attended the trials of Americans and others facing charges relating to free expression and the free practice of religion.

TURKMENISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and does not establish a state religion; however, in practice the Government continues to restrict all forms of religious expression. The law on religious organizations requires that religious groups must have at least 500 members in each locality in which they wish to register in order to gain legal status with the Government. The only religions that were registered successfully under the law in effect at the end of the reporting period were Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity, which are controlled by the Government. The Government has used the law to prevent all other religious groups from registering, despite the fact that some of those groups appear to have sufficient numbers of congregants to do so. The Government severely limits the activities of unregistered religious congregations by prohibiting them from gathering publicly, proselytizing, and disseminating religious materials. The Government's interpretation of the law severely restricts their freedom to meet and worship in private.

The status of government respect for religious freedom deteriorated during the period covered by this report. Although government harassment of nearly all unregistered religious groups lessened between June 2002 and April 2003, the Government resumed harassment of unregistered religious minority groups in April. Some observers attributed the decrease in harassment to the Government's focus on the emergence and suppression of internal political opposition, which culminated with an armed attack against President Niyazov's motorcade in November 2002. Harassment of religious groups was consistent with that experienced in years past and included detention, arrest, confiscation of religious literature and materials, pressure to abandon religious beliefs, and threats of eviction and loss of jobs. However, there were no reported incidents of torture. Human rights observers widely reported that the Government replaced a number of Sunni Muslim imams with individuals believed to be less independent in their interpretations of Islam, in an attempt to better facilitate government control of mosques.

There is no general, notable societal discrimination or violence based on religion in the country, although the overwhelming majority of Turkmen identify themselves as "Muslim," and Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert to other faiths are viewed with skepticism and sometimes ostracized, but

the society has historically been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs. The Government's restrictions on nontraditional religions do not stem from doctrinal differences or societal friction between the majority Muslim population and non-Muslim communities. Rather, some observers have speculated that official restrictions on religious freedom, a holdover from the Soviet era, reflect the Government's concern that liberal religious policies could lead to political dissent, particularly the emergence of extreme, political interpretations of Islam throughout the country. The Government appears to view active participation in or sponsorship of both traditional and nontraditional religions as a threat to the stability of the Government.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. During the period covered by this report, Embassy representatives raised specific cases of religious freedom abuses in meetings with government officials and urged greater support for religious freedom. Although the Government failed to respond to several formal requests for meetings with the Council on Religious Affairs, in meetings with high-level officials, the Ambassador urged them to rescind legislation requiring registration of religious groups and met with religious minority representatives to underscore U.S. support for religious freedom in the country. Improving registration for nongovernmental groups, including religious organizations, was a top U.S. priority. Embassy officers met with representatives of unregistered religious groups on a regular basis.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 188,407 square miles, and its population is approximately 5 million. Statistics regarding religious affiliation are not available. According to figures from the Government's most recent census in 1995, ethnic Turkmen constituted 77 percent of the population. Minority populations included ethnic Uzbeks (9.2 percent), ethnic Russians (6.7 percent), and ethnic Kazakhs (2 percent). Armenians, Azeris, and other ethnic groups comprised the remaining 5.1 percent of the population. The majority is Sunni Muslim, and the largest minority is Russian Orthodox Christian. The level of religious observance was unknown for both religions.

Ethnic Turkmen, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs are predominantly Sunni Muslim. There are small pockets of Shi'a Muslims in the country, many of whom are ethnic Iranians living along the border with Iran. There has been a modest, government-sponsored and tightly controlled revival of Islam since independence. During the Soviet era, there were only 4 mosques operating; now there are approximately 320. Restrictive government control, unorthodox indigenous Islamic culture, and 70 years of Soviet rule have meant that traditional mosque-based Islam does not play a dominant role in society. Traditional Turkmen interpretations of Islam place a heavy premium on rituals associated with birth, marriage, and death ("sadakas"), featuring music and dancing that more traditional Muslims view as unorthodox. Together with shrine pilgrimage, such rituals play a greater role in Turkmen Muslims' expression of Islam than regular prayer at mosques.

While the 1995 census showed that Russians comprised almost 7 percent of the population, subsequent emigration to Russia and elsewhere has reduced this proportion considerably. The majority of ethnic Russians and Armenians are Christian. Practicing Russian Christians are most likely to be members of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). There are 11 Russian Orthodox churches in the main cities, 3 of which are in Ashgabat. A priest resident in Ashgabat, who also is a Deputy Chairman of the Government's Council on Religious Affairs, leads the Russian Orthodox Church. He serves under the religious jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Archbishop in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. There are five Russian Orthodox priests, but no seminaries.

Russians and Armenians also comprise a significant percentage of unregistered religious congregations, although ethnic Turkmen appear to be increasingly represented among these groups as well. There are small communities of the following denominations: the Armenian Apostolic Church, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Pentecostal Christians, the Protestant Word of Life Church, the Greater Grace World Outreach Church, the New Apostolic Church, members of Jehovah's Witnesses, and several unaffiliated, non-denominational evangelical Christian groups. A very small community of ethnic Germans, most of whom live in and around the city of Serakhs, reportedly practices the Lutheran faith. There are also Baha'is (believed to number about 400 believers), Hare Krishnas, and Jews. None of these groups is registered or maintains churches, temples, or recognized places of worship. The Government demolished the Seventh-day Adventist church in 1999 and seized the Baptist church in 2001. The Roman Catholic community in

Ashgabat, which includes both citizens and foreigners, meets in the chapel of the Vatican Nunciature. Foreign missionaries, typically representing evangelical Protestant denominations, reportedly operate in the country, although the extent of their activities is unknown.

It is estimated that fewer than 1,000 ethnic Jews live in the country, virtually all of whom are non-practicing. Most are descendants from families that came to the country from Ukraine during World War II, but there also are some Jewish families living in Turkmenabat, on the border with Uzbekistan, who are members of the community known as Bokharski Jews, referring to the city of Bokhara, Uzbekistan. There are no synagogues or rabbis in the country and the Jewish community continues to dwindle as members emigrate to Israel, Russia, and Germany.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, as does the 1991 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, which was amended in 1995 and 1996; however, in practice the Government does not protect these rights. The law has been interpreted to tightly control religious life and severely restrict the activities of all religions. There are no safeguards in the legal system that provide for effective remedies against violation of religious freedom or persecution by private actors. Governmental entities at all levels, including the courts, have interpreted the laws in such a way as to discriminate against those practicing any faith other than Sunni Islam or Russian Orthodox Christianity.

According to the law on religious organizations, all congregations are required to register with the Government.

However, in order to register, a congregation must have 500 citizens of at least 18 years of age in each locality in which it wishes to register to attain legal status (i.e., it is not sufficient to have 500 members in the country as a whole). These requirements have made it impossible for religious communities other than Sunni Muslims and Russian Orthodox Christians to register. The situation is exacerbated because ethnic Turkmen members of Christian groups are hesitant to sign their names to a public document that shows that they have converted. Ethnic Turkmen who have converted to faiths other than Islam have been subjected to official harassment and mistreatment and, in some cases, social isolation.

There is no state religion, but the majority of the population is Sunni Muslim, and Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Turkmen society considers an individual born into an ethnicity and religion at the same time. Departures from the pattern are rare and either receive little support or are criticized in society. The Government has incorporated some aspects of Islamic tradition as part of its effort to redefine a national identity. However, the Government is concerned about the establishment of foreign-backed Islamic movements in the country.

The Government maintains tight control over the practice of Islam. It pays most Muslim clerics' salaries and approves all senior clerics' appointments, requiring them to report regularly to the Council on Religious Affairs. In 1997, the Government began prohibiting mosque-based imams from gathering pupils and formally teaching Islam in madrassas. Following President Niyazov's closure of a mosque and madrasa in Dashoguz in 2001, the Theological Faculty at Turkmen State University in Ashgabat became the only academic institution in the country to conduct Islamic education. The Government has since declared further restrictions on Islamic education. In January 2002, the President declared that clerical students would be limited to 15 to 20 a year and would spend 1 year at Artogrul Ghazi Mosque in Ashgabat and 1 year at the Gok Tepe Mosque. In January 2003, the popular former Mufti of Turkmenistan, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, was demoted and replaced, reportedly because he declined to call for the death penalty for perpetrators of the November 2002 attack against President Niyazov and because he was insufficiently rigorous in promoting "Rukhnama," President Niyazov's spiritual-social tome. In April, an Islamic secondary school operating under the auspices of the sole remaining theological faculty was closed, reportedly in part because of school administrators' and teachers' refusal to promote "Rukhnama" as an orthodox Islamic text.

Unregistered religious groups are prohibited officially from conducting religious activities, including gathering, disseminating religious materials, and proselytizing. This is a consequence of the Government's interpretation of the law rather than the law itself, which does not prohibit unregistered religious groups from gathering. In fact, the Law on Public Associations specifically excludes its application in the case of religious gatherings. Nevertheless, government authorities regularly invoke the Law on Public Associations when they disrupt meetings of unregistered religious groups, even if the meetings occur in private homes. Participants are subject to fines

and administrative arrest under the administrative code and, once administrative measures are exhausted, are subject to criminal prosecution. In such cases, the Soviet-era 1988 regulation on the procedure for conducting gatherings, meetings, marches, and demonstrations is applied, although gatherings in private homes are not within the scope of this regulation.

The Jehovah's Witnesses claim to have over 1,000 congregants in Ashgabat and submitted applications to legally register with the Council on Religious Affairs annually since 2001, but have never received a response. A group comprising various Protestant evangelical groups attempted to register a nondenominational Bible study society in Ashgabat in 2001, pooling members to reach the necessary 500 congregant requirement. The Council on Religious Affairs rejected that application, saying the group was too big to be a "society"—they had over 700 signatures—and was not a religion because different denominations were represented. Shiite Muslims have been denied registration several times since 1997. A number of Protestant evangelical groups did not attempt to register because they did not believe their applications would be approved and feared applying would prompt greater harassment.

There is no religious instruction in public schools. However, the Government requires regular instruction on "Rukhnama," President Niyazov's spiritual guidebook on Turkmen culture and heritage, in all public schools and institutes of higher learning. In 2002, the Halk Maslahaty (People's Council) declared Saturdays "Rukhnama Day," to be used for study of the text. At the beginning of the academic year in 2002, the Ministry of Education began requiring that each child bring a personal copy of "Rukhnama" to school. Copies of the book are kept in every mosque.

The Russian Orthodox Church conducts religious instruction classes for children. Some minority religious communities also conduct religious instruction classes for children. Home-schooling usually is allowed only in cases of severe illness or disability, and not for religious reasons.

The Government maintains the Council on Religious Affairs that reports to President Niyazov. The Chairman is the Imam of the Goek Tepe Mosque. He serves with three deputy chairmen: the Mufti of Turkmenistan, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church in Turkmenistan, and a government representative.

The Council ostensibly acts as an intermediary between the government bureaucracy and registered religious organizations. In practice it acts as an arm of the state, supervising the work of the two registered religions and selecting their personnel, as well as helping to control all religious publications and activities. Its writ is enforced through security and police forces, and it has no role in promoting interfaith dialog beyond that between these two religions. Although the Government does not officially favor any one religion, it does provide some financial and other support for the construction of new mosques to the Council on Religious Affairs.

Religious holidays that also are national holidays are all Muslim. These include Gurban Bairam (Eid al-Adha), a 3-day holiday that commemorates the end of the Hajj; and Oaza-Bairam (Eid al-Fitr), which commemorates the end of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting. These holidays do not have an overt negative impact on any non-Muslim groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government's registration requirements for religious groups, which specify that a group must have at least 500 citizens over the age of 18 as members in each locality, effectively prevent all religions but Sunni Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church from practicing openly. However, the only groups specifically banned by the Government are extremist groups that advocate violence.

The Government restricts organized religions in establishing places of worship. The Government does not allow unregistered groups to gather publicly or privately or to establish churches, temples, or other places of worship; it punishes individuals or groups who violate these prohibitions. Congregations continue to practice quietly and privately, largely in private homes.

During the period covered by this report, there were credible but unconfirmed reports that certain congregations of Russian Orthodox Christians were prevented from practicing their faith despite the religion's registration with the Government, while others were prevented from registering with the Government, despite apparently having the required minimum number of congregants.

The Government restricts the number of Muslim mosques by requiring government permission for construction. According to the Council on Religious Affairs, every village should have one mosque. Large, monumental mosques, such as the ones in Ashgabat and Goek Tepe, and the one planned for Gipchak, are supported by the Government. The local population supports village mosques. Villagers who

wish to build a mosque must obtain land from local authorities, get permission from nearby residents, and provide the funding for construction and maintenance.

The Government also controls and restricts access to Islamic education. After President Niyazov ordered all but a few madrassas to be closed in 1997 to prevent what he believed was inappropriate Islamic education, none were in operation during the reporting period, thereby preventing most mosque-based imams from teaching Islam. The President specified that future annual classes of religious students would be limited to between 15 to 20 students a year. The students would spend 2 years studying Islam, 1 year at the Artogrul Gazy Mosque in Ashgabat and another at the Goek Tepe Mosque. The Government controls the curriculum of this instruction.

In 2003 the Government continued to limit the number of persons allowed to participate in the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj), specifying that only 187 pilgrims out of the country's quota of 4,600 would be allowed to journey to Mecca. Transport was provided free of charge by the national airline. In January 2002, the Government abolished exit visas, in theory permitting travel to all those who wished to participate in the Hajj. The Government did not release statistics on how many pilgrims actually participated in the Hajj in 2002; however, there were anecdotal reports of individuals participating even though the Government closely screened travelers. In March 2003, following the failed assassination attempt on President Niyazov in the previous November, the Government formally reimposed an exit-visa regime, which had the effect of strengthening its ability to control who is able to perform the Hajj. Members of registered religions and unregistered religious minority groups have reported that the reimposition of the exit-visa regime has reduced their ability to attend conferences or undertake religious study abroad.

Although the Government continues to restrict the freedom of parents of some religious groups, such as the Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, to raise their children in accordance with their religious beliefs, the authorities have allowed other groups such as Roman Catholics, Baha'i, and Jews to continue quietly providing religious instruction.

Foreign missionary activity is prohibited, although both Christian and Muslim missionaries have some presence in the country. Ethnic Turkmen members of unregistered religious groups who are accused of disseminating religious material receive harsher treatment than non-ethnic Turkmen, particularly if they have received financial support from foreign sources. The Government monitors peaceful minority religions that are practiced in the country, particularly those that are perceived to have connections with or be supported by a supranational hierarchy. In televised remarks in January, President Niyazov warned the newly appointed Mufti of Turkmenistan against accepting money from foreigners seeking to patronize Turkmen mosques to propagate a more fundamentalist Islamic message.

In June 2002, President Niyazov issued a decree banning the import of foreign language newspapers and periodicals, ostensibly because of cost concerns. The ban has had the effect of making it difficult for religious minority groups, many of which are predominantly comprised of ethnic Russians, to import Russian-language Bibles and other religious literature. Beginning in July 2003, the Government prohibited the delivery of all Russian-language newspapers and periodicals into the country, citing high air-mail delivery rates. The ban has made it more difficult for religious minority groups, such as the ROC, to obtain and import religious literature and materials. The ROC is now barred from subscribing to their church's main journal, the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*.

During the reporting period, the Government confiscated copies of Christian literature, including the Bible, claiming that it was not authentic Christian religious literature. There were credible reports that authorities have claimed that Bibles not bearing the Russian Orthodox cross are not legitimate and are therefore subject to confiscation.

The enforced use of President Niyazov's spiritual guide, "Rukhnama," in educational institutions, mosques, and Russian Orthodox churches constitutes a restriction of freedom of thought, conscience, and belief. Copies of the book are kept in every mosque. There were credible reports that authorities pressured Russian Orthodox priests in March to teach "Rukhnama" in their services in Turkmenabat and Ashgabat.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

According to unconfirmed Forum 18 News Service reports, in May, police and officers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs authorities reportedly beat one Hare Krishna during an interrogation after authorities raided and arrested three Hare Krishnas in a home where they were meeting in Ashgabat. Authorities reportedly filmed the occupants of the home and confiscated all religious articles and religious

literature. Two were assessed administrative fines for violating the prohibition on gatherings of unregistered religious groups. According to unconfirmed Forum 18 News Service reports, a similar incident involving a raid on a Hare Krishna service in Mary took place in May.

Members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Turkmenabat have continued to meet since the Government razed their church building in 1999.

In April, authorities summoned a Jehovah's Witness to a meeting with the Chairman of the Council on Religious Affairs, who accused her of hosting a prayer meeting at her family home. She was released in exchange for signing a statement that the charge was incorrect and that she would not host such meetings in the future.

From early 2002 through April, there had been a dramatic decline in reports of severe government harassment of Baptists. However, since April, there were several incidents of government harassment of Baptist groups. According to BBC Monitoring and Forum 18, in March, officers raided worship services of an unregistered Baptist Church in Balkanabad. The church was accused of holding an unapproved meeting and the names, addresses, and places of work of the congregants, both children and adults, were taken.

According to Forum 18, on May 11, authorities broke up two unregistered Baptist Sunday services in the cities of Balkanabad and Turkmenbashi. The same source also reported that authorities raided at least four different Protestant congregations in the city of Ashgabat in May.

According to unconfirmed Forum 18 News Service reports, in June, authorities raided a Baptist prayer meeting in a private home in Turkmenabad and detained at least three persons. They were reportedly questioned for several hours about their religious beliefs and contacts between their group and Baptist Church officials abroad. In addition, two of the detainees were reportedly threatened with lengthy imprisonment unless they ceased meeting. The owner of the apartment used for the meeting was assessed an administrative fine of approximately \$25.00 at the unofficial exchange rate (500,000 manat); other detainees were fined approximately \$12.50 (250,000 manat).

In March 2002, a Jehovah's Witness was publicly criticized at a general assembly at her institute of higher learning and expelled for her religious beliefs. Unconfirmed Keston News Service reports describe a similar incident in October, when a teacher who is a Jehovah's Witness was publicly humiliated before her colleagues and threatened with dismissal if she did not renounce her faith. Also in October, four members of Jehovah's Witnesses were detained and fined for talking about their faith.

In May 2002, authorities raided a meeting of nondenominational Protestants in Denau. Government officials cut off natural gas, electricity, and water supplies to the entire community, in which the church meeting took place, prompting social condemnation of the congregants and pressure to stop the meetings. Local officials were particularly harsh in their treatment of the group, reportedly because they were frustrated that ethnic Turkmen had chosen a faith other than Islam.

In November 2002, authorities in Bairamali questioned a local member of an unregistered religious minority group about her beliefs, pressured her to stop meeting with fellow believers, questioned her neighbors about her activities, and told her she would not be allowed to leave the country to attend a religious convention.

In November and December 2002, a local imam, acting in concert with intelligence and law enforcement authorities, attempted to pressure a member of an unregistered religious minority living in Turkmenkala to abandon her beliefs. They forced her to surrender religious literature and threatened to resettle her to a labor colony and strip her sons of their jobs if she persisted in teaching and distributing literature about her faith to members of her village. Fellow villagers criticized the woman, an ethnic Turkmen from a Muslim family, for being an adherent of another faith. Authorities told the woman even Muslims did not have the right to teach Islam in Turkmenistan, saying "Rukhnama" was the only spiritual book recognized in the country.

In March, authorities raided a meeting of an unregistered religious minority group. Four of the participants were each assessed administrative fines of approximately \$12.50 (250,000 manat); one teenage boy and a pensioner were exempted.

In April, police raided a meeting of an unregistered Christian group in Ashgabat, detaining 11 adults and 13 children. Most were held for 6 hours and released, but 3 adults were detained overnight. Authorities confiscated the group's Bibles, saying they were contraband, and demanded that adult congregants disclose the identities of their leader and of the individuals who had provided the group with Bibles. Congregants were verbally threatened during custody but were not physically abused. The three leaders of the group were assessed administrative fines of approximately \$12.50 (250,000 manat) for violating the prohibition on meetings of un-

registered religious groups. One of the leaders appealed the decision. A judge at the appeal hearing asked why the group's members needed any version of Christianity other than the Russian Orthodox Church and then affirmed the lower court's decision to assess a fine.

In April, authorities summoned a member of an unregistered religious minority group to the Kopet Dag Etrap offices for a meeting with the district Hakim, the Mufti of Turkmenistan, and a Deputy Mayor. The Mufti and Mayor were members of the Council on Religious Affairs. The officials accused him of holding illegal church meetings at his home and threatened to confiscate his state-owned apartment if they continued.

In May, officers of the Ministry of National Security (MNB) and local police raided a meeting of five members of the same group in Abadan. Authorities confiscated Bibles and other religious materials and detained them overnight, forcing them to sign statements not to hold or attend such meetings again. In June, the same congregants were detained and questioned again and each was assessed a fine of approximately \$12.50 (250,000 manat) for holding an illegal meeting of an unregistered religious group. A local MNB officer threatened to evict the owner of the apartment in which the meeting was held, and to resettle him in a rural area if meetings were held at his home again. Another member of the group, a teacher, was pressured to sign a letter of resignation, but refused to do so. She had lost her job in 2001 after a meeting she was attending was raided, but was reinstated after the group sent a letter to President Niyazov highlighting abuse by local officials. She was allowed to keep her job after teaching a class in Turkmen language and demonstrating knowledge of "Rukhnama."

In May, authorities mistakenly raided the birthday party of a 16-year-old girl, believing it was a meeting of an unregistered religious minority group. Officials took the names of the teenagers in attendance and summoned the girl's parents and the group's leader for questioning.

In May, authorities raided a meeting of an unregistered religious minority group, which had met without incident for nearly 10 years. Authorities took the names of all congregants and warned them not to hold such meetings in the future. They also threatened to take custody of a number of children and teenagers who attended the meeting, although all of them either had signed permission from their parents to attend or were the children of congregants.

Since early 2002, there have been few confirmed reports of government harassment of the Protestant Word of Life Church. In November 2001, police raided a Protestant Word of Life Church meeting in a private apartment in Ashgabat. Many of those in attendance suffered severe consequences such as deportation, large fines, threats of dismissal from work, confiscation of identity documents, and long-term imprisonment if fines were not paid. There was an unconfirmed report that one member was sentenced to 15 days in prison.

The Government threatened members of religious minority groups with loss of employment and housing because of their religious beliefs. In at least one case, a university student was expelled because of her affiliation with an unregistered religious group.

Since January 2002, there have been no reports of harassment of Pentecostals.

Two prisoners, both members of Jehovah's Witnesses, were serving sentences for refusing to perform compulsory military service because of their religious beliefs. In October, the Supreme Court upheld a second conviction for Jehovah's Witness Nikolai Shelekhov, who was sentenced to 18 months in prison in 2002 for refusing to perform compulsory military service, after previously serving a 1-year sentence for the same crime. Shelekhov's second conviction came only 6 months after his release from the prison colony at which he served 1 year for the same offense. Kurban Zakirov was sentenced to 1 year in 1999 and has been detained since, reportedly for refusing to take an oath of loyalty to President Niyazov and the state while placing his hand on a copy of the Koran, a customary procedure for prisoners who benefit from the annual Presidential Amnesty.

According to unconfirmed Keston News Service reports, Oguldzhan Dzhumanazarova, who was convicted of fraud and sentenced to 4 years in prison in 2001, remained in prison. The Jehovah's Witness community claims that the accusations of fraud were based on fabricated evidence. There are no other confirmed cases of religious detainees or prisoners remaining in detention.

There were no confirmed cases in which the Government carried out or permitted the forced resettlement of persons based on their religious beliefs or practices. However, authorities threatened individual members of several religious minority groups with resettlement unless they immediately ceased holding or attending meetings of their respective groups.

Religious leader Hoja Ahmed Orazglychev remained in internal exile in Tedjen, after serving a prison term for unregistered religious activity.

In January 2002, Baptist prisoner of conscience Shageldy Atakov was released from prison. Atakov had been in prison since 1999 for making an illegal transfer of automobiles in 1994. His original sentence of 2 years had been extended to 4 years and he was fined \$12,000, an unusually large fine for such an offense. Atakov denied the charges and claimed that he was being imprisoned because of his religious beliefs. Following his early release from prison, Atakov was placed under 1 month of observation by agents of the KNB, after which he was given complete freedom of movement and allowed to receive visitors. Embassy officers visited Atakov on two separate occasions. He was in fair health and reported no serious problems. Unconfirmed reports indicated that harassment began again and his property was confiscated. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Atakov and his family left the country to seek asylum.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had 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, there were no accounts that the Government tortured members of any religious groups.

Most religious minority groups reported a general abatement of harassment by the Government between June 2002 and early 2003; however, the Government renewed systematic harassment of such groups in April.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There were no reports of general, overt societal discrimination or violence based on religion during the period covered by this report. Although more traditional adherents of Islam consider Turkmen interpretations to be unorthodox and many Turkmen do not regularly attend mosques, the overwhelming majority of Turkmen identify themselves as "Muslim" and Turkmen identity is linked to Islam. Ethnic Turkmen who choose to convert from Islam to other faiths are viewed skeptically and sometimes ostracized, although Turkmen society has historically been tolerant and inclusive of different religious beliefs. For example, in the early part of the 20th century, Ashgabat was a refuge for members of the Baha'i Faith escaping persecution in Iran, and the first Baha'i temple was built in Ashgabat. Government repression of minority religions does not reflect doctrinal or societal friction between the majority Muslim population and minority religions. Rather, observers believe that it reflects the Government's concern that the proliferation of nontraditional religions could undermine state control, promote civil unrest, facilitate undue influence by foreign interests, and destabilize the Government.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

In November 2002, the Ambassador urged the Government to release imprisoned Jehovah's Witness Kurban Zakirov and others in the December 2002 Presidential Amnesty. In November 2002, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner, celebrating the breaking of the fast during Ramadan, in support of religious tolerance and interfaith dialog.

In 2003, the Government refused to respond to multiple requests for the U.S. Ambassador and other Embassy officers to meet with the Council on Religious Affairs. However, the Ambassador and Embassy officers raised specific reports of abuse and urged greater respect for religious freedom in unscheduled encounters with members of the Council on Religious Affairs. The Ambassador also raised specific reports and urged ending numerically-based registration for religious minority groups in multiple meetings with the Foreign Minister in 2003. During the period covered by this report, the Ambassador and Embassy officers met regularly with the staff of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Center in Ashgabat and other diplomatic missions to maximize cooperation in monitoring abuses of and promoting greater respect for religious freedom. The Ambassador and Embassy officers regularly met with representatives of registered and unregistered religious groups to monitor their situation, receive reports of abuse, and discuss

measures to raise their cases with the Government. Embassy officers visited Shegeldy Atakov on two separate occasions during the period covered by this report.

UKRAINE

The 1996 Constitution and the 1991 law on Freedom of Conscience provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects these rights in practice; however, there were some problems at the local level, often as a result of local officials taking sides in conflicts between religious organizations. Religious groups of all beliefs flourished; however, some local officials at times impeded attempts by minority and nontraditional religions to register and to buy or lease property.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Registration and property restitution problems remained; however, the Government continued to facilitate the return of some properties.

The generally amicable relationship among religious believers in society contributed to religious freedom; however, there were some exceptions, particularly among leaders of rival branches of the same faith. There were isolated instances of anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic sentiments. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (All-Ukrainian Council) provided a forum to resolve disputes and discuss relevant legislation.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 233,088 square miles, and its population is 48.4 million. Estimates of those who consider themselves believers vary widely. A nationwide survey conducted in 2001 by the research center SOCIS found that over 40 percent of the inhabitants considered themselves to be atheists; however, a poll of 1,200 Ukrainians conducted in late 2002 by the nongovernmental organization Regional Initiatives found that only 4 percent considered themselves atheist, whereas 65 percent said they were believers. Religious practice is strongest in the western part of the country. In 1991 there were 13,019 registered religious communities. As of January, there were 27,446.

More than 90 percent of religiously active citizens are Christian, with the majority being Orthodox. Approximately 10 percent of the overall population are members of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, sometimes known as the Uniate, Byzantine, or Eastern Rite Church. Roman Catholics claim 1 million adherents, or approximately 2 percent of the total population. There are small but significant populations of Jews and Muslims, as well as growing communities of Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Evangelical Christians, adherents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Most citizens identify themselves as Orthodox Christians of one of three Churches. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), Moscow Patriarchate, is the largest single religious community and is the largest of the country's Orthodox Churches. The Church has 10,040 registered communities, most of them located in the central, southern, and eastern parts of the country. The Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan) of Kiev heads the Church within the country.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), Kiev Patriarchate, was formed after independence and has been headed since 1995 by Patriarch Filaret (Denisenko), who once had been the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine. The UOC-Kiev Patriarchate has 3,196 registered parishes, approximately 60 percent of which are in the western part of the country.

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) is the smallest of the three major Orthodox Churches in the country; it was founded in 1919 in Kiev. Outlawed by Stalin in 1933, the Church survived in Soviet times mainly among the Ukrainian Diaspora. It was legalized in 1989 and has 1,110 registered communities, most of them in the western part of the country. In the interest of the possible future unification of the country's Orthodox Churches, it did not name a Patriarch to succeed the late Patriarch Dmitriy. The UAOC is headed by Metropolitan Mefodiy of Ternopil and Podil.

The adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church constitute the second largest group of believers after the Christian Orthodox Churches. The Council of Brest formed the Church in 1596 to unify Orthodox and Roman Catholic believers. This Church celebrates a Byzantine (Orthodox) liturgy but is in full communion with the

Pope. The Soviet regime forced the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to reunite with the Orthodox Church after the Second World War; however, it survived in hiding inside the country and among the Diaspora. Legalized in 1989, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church had 3,334 registered communities as of January 1. Its members constituted a majority of the believers in the west, and approximately 10 percent of the population as a whole, or approximately 4.5 to 5 million persons. The head of the Church is Lyubomyr Cardinal Huzar, Major Archbishop of Lviv.

The Roman Catholic Church is associated traditionally with historical pockets of citizens of Polish ancestry who live mainly in the central and western regions. The Roman Catholic Church, headed by Marian Cardinal Jaworski, Archbishop of Lviv, has 847 registered communities serving approximately 2 percent of the population.

The Jewish community has a long history on the territory of the country. Many Jewish inhabitants perished in the Holocaust, and still others were victims of Soviet repression. Estimates vary about the size of the present-day Jewish population. According to the State Committee of Statistics, the Jewish population during the 2001 census was estimated at 103,600, although some foreign observers estimate it at 300,000. Observers believe that 35 to 40 percent of the Jewish population are active communally; there are 262 registered Jewish communities.

The Jewish population faces demographic difficulties. Emigration to Israel and the West has decreased the size of the Jewish population by 20,000 to 30,000 annually in recent years. In addition, the average age of Jews in the country is 60; scholars and local Jewish leaders estimate that approximately 12 deaths occur for every birth in the community. Despite these demographic indicators, Jewish life continues to flourish, with additional communities registered every year due to an increased proportion of Jews practicing their faith (helped by an increase in the number of Rabbis entering the country from Israel and elsewhere since independence) and an increased willingness of individuals to identify themselves openly as Jewish. Most observant Jews are Orthodox. The Chief Rabbi of all Orthodox Jews is Yaakov dov Bleich, a Karliner Stoller Hasidic rabbi. Although smaller, the Progressive (Reform) Jewish movement continues to grow, with 47 communities at the end of the period covered by this report. The Chief Rabbi of the Progressive community is Rabbi Alexander Dukhovny. In 2001 a Conservative Jewish congregation was started in Uzhhorod. Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki of the Chabad Lubavitch movement has a congregation in Dnipropetrovsk.

Islam has also been practiced on the territory of the country for centuries. Sheik Tamim Akhmed Mohammed Mutach, head of the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Ukraine and representative on the All-Ukrainian Council, estimated that there were as many as 2 million members of the Muslim community, although other estimates are substantially lower. There are 462 registered Muslim communities. Sheik Tamim notes that approximately 50,000 Muslims—mostly foreign—live in Kiev. Many of the country's Muslims are Crimean Tatars. The Crimean Tatars were deported forcibly from Crimea in 1944 but began returning in 1989. Approximately 267,000, or 12 percent, of Crimea's population are Crimean Tatars. The leader of the Muslims of Crimea is Mufti Emirali Ablayev.

Protestant Churches have grown in the years since independence. Evangelical Baptists are perhaps the largest group, claiming over 140,000 members in approximately 2,270 communities. Other growing communities include Seventh-day Adventists, Pentecostals, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Evangelical Christians. There are also new communities of Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and others.

The growth in the numbers of communities representing nontraditional religious movements is evidence of the religious freedom in the country. As of July 1, according to the State Committee for Religious Affairs (SCRA), 39 Krishna Consciousness communities, 42 Buddhist communities, and 13 Baha'i communities were registered.

Foreign religious workers are active in many faiths and denominations. They play a particularly active role in Protestant and Mormon communities where missionary activity has been central to community growth. The Jewish community also depends on foreign religious workers; many Rabbis are not citizens. In 2002, 12,203 foreign religious workers were admitted to the country. In the first 6 months of 2003, 5,622 individuals entered with religious visas.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The 1996 Constitution and the 1991 law on Freedom of Conscience provide for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects these rights in practice; however, some minority and nontraditional religions have experienced difficulties in registration and in buying and leasing property.

The law requires virtually all religious organizations to register with the State. The SCRA is responsible for liaison with religious organizations and for the execution of state policy on religion. The SCRA's headquarters are in Kiev; it maintains representatives in all regional centers, as well as in the autonomous cities of Kiev and Sevastopol. Each religious organization with more than 10 adult members must register its articles and statutes either as a local or national organization in order to obtain the status of a "juridical entity," necessary to conduct many economic activities including publishing, banking, and property transactions. Registration is also necessary to be considered for restitution of religious property. National organizations must register with the SCRA, and then each local affiliate must register with the local office of the SCRA in the region where they are located. By law the registration process should take 1 month, or 3 months if the SCRA requests an expert opinion on the legitimacy of a group applying for registration. According to the SCRA, the average registration period is 3 months. Registration may take 6 months for cases in which the SCRA requires additional expert evaluation. Denial of registration may be appealed in court. In addition to registering religious organizations, local offices of the SCRA supervise compliance with the provisions of the law.

The SCRA often consults with the All-Ukrainian Council, whose membership represents the faiths of over 90 percent of the religiously active population. The All-Ukrainian Council meets once every 2 or 3 months and has a rotating chairmanship. Representative members also use the Council as a means of discussing potential problems between religious faiths. The Council also has provided a forum through which religious organizations can consult with the Government on relevant draft legislation. Members of the Council discussed further improvement of legislation on church-state relations. A separate meeting focused on the implementation of a March 2002 presidential decree on religious matters. The Progressive Jewish Community reported that its application for registration in Kharkiv took 1 year before being approved.

There has been no action in Parliament on draft amendments to the Law on Religion submitted by the Government in June 2002 and resubmitted in May. Members of the religious community had expressed dissatisfaction with some aspects of the legislation.

There is no state religion. The UOC-Moscow Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church tend to predominate in the east and west of the country, respectively, and some religious leaders allege that local government officials in the east and west favor the predominant confessions. Each of the major religions and many of the smaller ones maintain a presence in all parts of the country. The central Government has spoken out in favor of unity of the country's Orthodox Churches; it has tried to treat all Orthodox Churches equally.

Officially, religion must be kept out of the public school curriculum; however, the Government has attempted to introduce training in "basic Christian ethics" into schools. While Jewish leaders supported the teaching of ethics and civics in school, they insisted on a non-sectarian approach to this training. A working group was formed in the All-Ukrainian Council to discuss the issue; however, a resolution has yet to be reached. Orthodox symbols and ceremonies are routinely used in the armed forces as well. Schools run by religious communities may, and do, include religious education as an extracurricular activity.

The country officially celebrates numerous religious holidays, including Christmas Day, Easter Monday, and Holy Trinity Day, all celebrated according to the Julian Calendar shared by Orthodox and Greek Catholics.

Under existing law, religious organizations maintain a privileged status as the only organizations permitted to seek restitution of property confiscated by the Soviet regime. During the period covered by this report, only buildings and objects immediately necessary for religious worship were subject to restitution. Communities must apply to regional authorities. While the consideration of a claim should be completed within a month, it frequently takes much longer. According to the SCRA, during 2002 the Government transferred ownership of 187 buildings that originally were constructed as places of worship to religious communities, for a total of 8,776 since independence in 1991. In addition, during 2002 religious communities received ownership of 358 premises (i.e. buildings or sections of buildings) converted into places of worship and another 524 religious buildings that were not designated for worship, such as former religious schools, hospitals, and clerical residences, totaling 2,388 and 1,313, respectively, since independence. Intra-communal competition for particular properties complicated the restitution issue, both for some Christian and some Jewish communities. The slow pace of restitution was also a reflection of the country's difficult economic situation, which severely limited funds available for the relocation of the occupants of seized religious property. Some groups asserted that

there was progress in the restitution of property, while others reported a lack of progress.

On September 27, at the instruction of President Kuchma, the Cabinet approved an action plan designed to return religious buildings to the religious organizations that formerly owned them. Under the Cabinet's instruction, a working group is operating in Kiev to settle issues pertaining to the use of premises and territory of the Upper and Lower Lavra of the Kiev-Pechersk National Historical and Architectural Preserve and the male monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God. The Government also is seeking mechanisms to return the following former church premises and property: St. Iona's, St. Flor and Lavr's, and St. Panteleymon's monasteries in Kiev, Pochayiv Lavra monastery in the Ternopil Oblast, Odesa Theological Seminary, and others. The Government owns St. Michael's, St. Andrew's, and Pecherska Lavra Upper Monastery in Kiev. The State has said it will retain ownership of all three until the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches unite. Until then, the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate may hold services at St. Michael's on Sundays and holidays, while St. Andrew's and the Pecherska Lavra are made available to the UAOC and the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate.

The SCRA also participated in drafting the Law on Amendments to the Land Code, which would provide for the permanent use of land by religious organizations; the law was not enacted by the end of the period covered by this report. The SCRA also participated in the drafting of the law on pension coverage for clergy, sextons, and individuals who held elective posts in religious organizations prior to the adoption of the Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Government continued to facilitate the building of houses of worship by allocation of land plots for new construction and through restitution of religious buildings to their rightful owners; however, members of numerous communities described difficulties in dealing with the municipal administrations in Kiev and other large cities to obtain land and building permits—problems not limited to religious groups. The Government continued to return properties expropriated during the Soviet era to religious groups; however, not all groups regarded the pace of restitution as satisfactory, and all major religious communities continued to have outstanding restitution claims.

The law restricts the activities of “nonnative,” foreign-based, religious organizations (“native religions” are defined as Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Jewish), and narrowly defines the permissible activities of members of the clergy, preachers, teachers, and other non-citizen representatives of foreign-based religious organizations; however, in practice there were no reports that the Government used the law to limit the activity of nonnative religious organizations. Religious worker visas require invitations from registered Ukrainian religious organizations and the approval of the SCRA. They may preach, administer religious ordinances, or practice other canonical activities “only in those religious organizations which invited them to Ukraine and with official approval of the governmental body that registered the statutes and the articles of the pertinent religious organization.” In past years, fewer than one half of one percent of applications for religious visas were refused, according to the SCRA, usually because applicants improperly filled out forms. There were no reports of denials of religious visas during the period covered by this report.

Representatives of the Progressive Jewish Communities claimed that local authorities and Chabad Lubavitch officials made statements against their community in the local press while the group was organizing communities in Dnipropetrovsk. The Progressive Jewish Community claims not only that the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad Community opposes the registration of any Jewish community but itself in the region, but also that under pressure from Chabad Lubavitch it was denied registration in Dnipropetrovsk. The Progressive Community dropped its registration bid in 2002. Dnipropetrovsk was home to the father of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Schneerson; however, Chabad Lubavitch officials claim that they actually assisted the Progressive Jewish Community's attempts to establish two communities in Dnipropetrovsk oblast and subsequently have supported these communities financially. The Progressive Jewish Community also reported that the Community's application for registration in Kharkiv took 1 year before being approved.

Representatives of the Muslim community noted that they have been unable to register a community in Kharkiv for the past 11 years. Muslims often are subject to document checks by local police, particularly in Kharkiv and Poltava. They have raised this issue with the Presidential Administration and the SCRA. Islamic community leaders expressed frustration with the Ministry of Education, which has yet

to register a single Islamic school. These leaders suggested they are continuing to work with the SCRA to register their primary and secondary schools. As of June 30, there were Islamic universities in Kiev and Donetsk. As religious institutions, they have been registered since their inception by the SCRA. The Muslim community in Mykolayiv sought unsuccessfully to obtain permission to use an old mosque.

Although evangelical groups have expressed concerns in the past about possible government discrimination against individual believers of nonnative religions, evangelical leaders indicated that their members had reported no such discrimination during the period covered by this report.

In December 2002, the Suvorov District Court ordered a Pentecostal Church in Kherson closed for holding open-air services the previous June and July without permission from the local authorities. Members complied with the closure order and joined another Pentecostal Church; however, such incidents appeared to be isolated, as permission for open-air services was usually granted.

Government officials worked with members of the Jehovah's Witnesses to facilitate the preparations for the Church's major international convention scheduled to be held in Kiev in August.

A range of organizational measures was implemented to support the pilgrimage to the Foot of the First-Called Apostle Andrew. The Foot was brought from Greece and after several days in the country was returned to Greece in late June.

Jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, State Border Guard Committee, State Customs Service, State Committee for Tourism, and other agencies the SCRA held several working meetings, including site visits, to support the pilgrimage of Jews to the burial site of Nakhman Tsadyk in Uman, Cherkasy Oblast. The pilgrimage was due to take place in late September.

Representatives of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church cited difficulties in providing religious services to soldiers and objected to the need to obtain approval for prison ministry activities from prison chaplains of the Moscow Patriarchate. There was no alteration in these procedures during the period covered by this report.

There continue to be charges that religious land is being used inappropriately. Local officials in the western district of Volodymyr-Volynskyy continued to allow construction of an apartment building on the site of an old Jewish cemetery despite a December 17 court ruling that construction be halted and a letter from the Ministry of Culture and Arts asking for a halt in construction until the court case is resolved. Local authorities have refused to implement the relevant court decisions. Despite requests from the Roman Catholic Church, the government has not transferred its ownership of St. Nicholas's Cathedral in Kiev to the Church. The Church uses the Cathedral on weekends and major religious holidays.

At times, local governments in regions that are traditionally dominated by one or another religious group discriminate against their rivals in restituting property and granting registration. Representatives of the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate, the UAOC, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church alleged government preference for the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate in the east. Roman Catholic representatives allege governmental discrimination in favor of the three Orthodox churches. Moscow Patriarchate representatives claim that their worshipers in Lviv and other Western Ukrainian cities experience intense pressure. Kiev Patriarchate representatives cited local authorities' failure to return cathedrals in Kharkiv and Zhytomyr and complained that some local governments in regions traditionally dominated by the Moscow Patriarchate, including Odesa, Poltava, and some western oblasts, deliberately dragged their feet over registration of congregations that had left the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate for the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate. Although the Kiev Patriarchate has tried to make use of the appeal process on denials of restitution, none of the appeals has been successful. The Kiev Patriarchate expressed concern that local officials in Poltava handed control of a church from the Kiev to the Moscow Patriarchate. Roman Catholic representatives expressed frustration at unrealized restitution claims in Simferopol, Sevastopol, Bila Tserkva, Uman, Zhytomyr, and Kiev. Priests of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad complained of pressure from local authorities and the Moscow Patriarchate to surrender a church building to the Moscow Patriarchate.

Outstanding claims for restitution remain among all the major religious communities. Many properties for which restitution is sought are occupied, often by state institutions, or are historical landmarks.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On September 27, 2002, in compliance with a presidential decree, the Cabinet approved a series of measures aimed at eliminating the consequences of the Soviet regime's religious policies. In accordance with the plan, the State Property Fund submitted to the central Interagency Commission a list of buildings, sites, and property that are not used for their designated purpose and to which religious communities have claims. As of June 30, the SCRA, in conjunction with state and local bodies, assisted in the restoration and construction of 2,500 places of worship.

Among those sacred buildings the Government returned during the period covered by this report was the Choral Synagogue in Kharkiv, which was transferred to the Union of the Hasidim of Chabad Lubavitch Jewish religious communities of the Kharkiv Region.

As of June 30, the Government had agreed to the transfer of the following buildings: The Cathedral of the Protection of the Mother of God in Chuhuyiv; a former Dominican cathedral to a religious community of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Lviv; and buildings of "Svyati Hory" (Holy Mountains) sanatorium to the Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Slovyanohorsk, Donetsk Oblast. The building of a former synagogue was transferred to the Jewish religious community in Slovyansk. Three buildings of the former St. Hryhoriy's Byzyukiv monastery were transferred into ownership of the Moscow Patriarchate in Chervonyy Mayak village, Kherson Oblast. The Kiev Patriarchate was pleased to have resolved a dispute with local officials over religious premises in Crimea; the church obtained a 50-year lease on the land. Although Ukrainian Greek Catholic representatives had reported that the Moscow Patriarchate repeatedly blocked their attempts to gain a plot of land for the purposes of building a church in Kharkiv, officials granted them a plot during the reporting period. Roman Catholic representatives noted positively that local authorities reversed previous decisions and granted the Roman Catholic Church a plot of land to build a church in Chernihiv. In Kherson, the building of the Avangard cinema was transferred for the use of St. Panteleimon's parish.

High level Government officials attended the ceremonies of a variety of faiths.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

Relations among the adherents of various religious groups remained for the most part amicable; however, there were strains, particularly among the leadership of contending religious organizations.

The debate regarding possible unification of some or all of the three Orthodox Churches and/or granting them canonical status as an autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church has lost momentum. Leaders of the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate and the UAOC began negotiations on unification in the hope that, when unified, they would be recognized as the country's Orthodox Church by Orthodoxy's "First Among Equals," Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. While an agreement was reached to allow priests of these two churches to celebrate liturgies together, unification negotiations remained stalled at the end of the period covered by this report. These tensions have geographical and political ramifications. Support for an independent local Orthodox Church (based on the Kiev Patriarchate and Autocephalous Churches) is strongest in the west and among center-right political parties. Eastern Ukrainians and leftist parties tend to support continued union with the Russian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Bartholomew has supported efforts aimed at Orthodox unity, meeting with or sending delegations to each of the three main Orthodox Churches to discuss the issue. He has not expressed an opinion as to who should lead a united Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Tensions remain between some adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate over control of property in the western part of the country, a legacy of the forcible reunification of these two churches under the Soviet regime. The UOC-Moscow Patriarchate also accused the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of attempting to expand in regions where traditionally the Moscow Patriarchate is strong.

Disputes between the Kiev and Moscow Patriarchates also continued.

One ongoing dispute began in May 2002 when a priest, churchwarden, and several other parishioners of St. Nicholas' Church in Poltava left the UOC Kiev Patriarchate and joined the UOC Moscow Patriarchate. The parishioners loyal to the Kiev Patriarchate filed a lawsuit against what they described as an illegal seizure

of the church building by the Moscow Patriarchate. The Zhovnevyi District Court in Poltava ruled that the church belongs to the Moscow Patriarchate in accordance with the decision of the priest and parish members. In response to the appeal by the Kiev Patriarchate supporters, the Poltava Oblast Appeals Court overruled the District Court and ordered a reexamination of the case. In the meantime, the Kiev Patriarchate appointed a new priest to the church. The local authorities allowed the faithful of both Churches to use the building on a rotational basis. In May the Moscow Patriarchate priest and his supporters assaulted the faithful of the Kiev Patriarchate during the latter's rotation time, then blockaded the church entrance. The Moscow Patriarchate continued to insist that the church as a whole decided to leave the Kiev Patriarchate on its own to join the Moscow Patriarchate but, according to the Kiev Patriarchate, only approximately a dozen of its members joined the Moscow Patriarchate.

In May, according to the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate, supporters of the UOC-Kiev Patriarchate disrupted a religious service held by parishioners of the Moscow Patriarchate at St. Kosma and Damian's Church in Hlybochok village, Trostyanets District in Vinnytsya oblast. The Kiev Patriarchate's supporters reportedly blocked the exit, broke a church window, and demanded that the Moscow Patriarchate parish vacate the building. Local police stopped the confrontation.

Crimean Tatar representatives claim significant societal discrimination against their people, but not necessarily for religious reasons. In Kharkiv, Muslim students primarily of Arab and African origins, of various institutions of higher education, reported instances of discriminatory documentation inspection and slander perpetrated by the local police force and other citizens.

A Pentecostal religious organization alleged the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate ordered the reprinting of criticism of Pentecostals, originally published in Russia, in a Crimean newspaper. The same organization alleged that the UOC-Moscow Patriarchate sought to intervene with government officials in an attempt to derail the construction of religious buildings.

Despite the efforts of Jewish and Ukrainian Greek Catholic leaders to find a just and peaceful solution to the conflicts in Kiev and Sambir, Lviv Oblast, as a result of the presence of crosses on Jewish cemeteries, these disputes were unresolved at the end of the period covered by this report. In Kiev one cross remained on the territory of an old Jewish cemetery near the site of a Nazi massacre at Babyn Yar. Jewish leaders assert that the cross was erected without a building permit and asked that it be removed. In Sambir the Ukrainian Jewish community began construction of a memorial park at the site of an old Jewish cemetery and Holocaust massacre site with the assistance of a foreign benefactor. Ukrainian nationalists, with the apparent assistance of local officials, erected crosses on the site to mark the Christian victims of Nazi terror there. While memorial organizers supported the recognition of all groups who suffered on the Sambir site, they opposed the use of Christian religious symbols on the territory of the Jewish cemetery. At the same time, local Ukrainian nationalists remain opposed to the use of Jewish symbols or Hebrew in the memorial.

Acts of anti-Semitism continue to be infrequent. There were no reports of anyone having been apprehended following the June 2002 vandalism of a Holocaust memorial in Zhytomyr. One Jewish community leader stated that this and earlier attacks were not indicative of an overall anti-Semitic societal attitude; he did not see a rise in anti-Semitic acts from prior years. Seven individuals were convicted in connection with the April 2002 attack on the Synagogue in Kiev. The instigator received a 4-year sentence. Six others, aged 15–17, received sentences ranging from 18 months to 2 years.

Anti-Semitic articles appear frequently in small publications and irregular newsletters, although such articles rarely appear in the national press. The journal "Personnel," whose executive board includes several parliamentary deputies, published anti-Semitic articles. The Jewish community received support from public officials in criticizing articles in the journal. Nonetheless, the publication won a libel suit against a local newspaper that had made claims that it published anti-Semitic articles.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT ACTION

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights, on a regular basis, pressing U.S. Government concerns actively when the situation is warranted. A majority of foreign religious workers are American, and the Embassy has intervened as necessary to defend their rights to due process under the law. The U.S. Embassy received no reports of religious-worker visa problems during the period

covered by this report. The U.S. Embassy raised with relevant officials the difficulties that an American Greek Catholic priest has experienced in obtaining proper recognition of his academic qualifications, which is necessary for the priest to continue working. The SCRA and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided assistance and clarification to the Embassy as it assisted U.S. citizens in ascertaining and asserting their rights.

The U.S. Ambassador, as well as other Embassy officers, demonstrated the U.S. Government's concern for religious freedom by maintaining an ongoing dialog with government and religious leaders on this topic, as well as by their presence at significant events in the country's religious life. U.S. Embassy officers attended significant Holocaust memorials, including the Babyn Yar commemoration in Kiev and the opening of a Holocaust memorial in Vinnytsia, as well as photographic exhibits by local Jewish artists. Embassy officers also met with Muslim leaders in Kiev, Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, and Crimea in an effort to understand the concerns of those communities. The Ambassador hosted an interfaith meeting in Lviv and an Iftar dinner in Kiev, which facilitated dialogue among the various religious leaders.

The U.S. Embassy assigned personnel to report on religious issues, the restitution of church property, interfaith dialog and disputes, anti-Semitism, and human rights. In the course of this reporting, Embassy officers maintained close contact not only with clerics, but also with lay leaders in religious communities and representatives of faith-based social service organizations, such as Caritas and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, both of which are active in the country. In addition, the Embassy facilitated similar meetings with such groups for U.S. Members of Congress and other visiting U.S. officials.

The Embassy closely monitored the Sambir and Volodymyr-Volynskyy cemetery cases, raising them with the State Committee on Religious Affairs. Embassy officers visited the cemetery in Volodymyr-Volynskyy and met with local officials to discuss the case. The Embassy also raised the Volodymyr-Volynskyy cemetery case with the Volyn State Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Prime Minister's office, and the Presidential Administration. In addition, the U.S. Embassy has raised these cemetery cases, as well as the restitution situation in general, with government officials. The Public Affairs Section sponsored a grant for the production of a documentary film on the life of the eminent Ukrainian Jewish lawyer Arnold Margolin.

Representatives of the U.S. Department of State and representatives of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Cultural Heritage Abroad met with various government officials and religious leaders during the year.

UNITED KINGDOM

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Church of England and the Church of Scotland are established churches.

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

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Centuries-old sectarian divisions—and instances of violence—persist in Northern Ireland.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total area of 94,525 square miles, and its population in 2000 was approximately 59.8 million. The census conducted in April 2001 contained a voluntary question on religion; the results were released in February 2003. The topic of religion was new to the official statistics for England, Wales and Scotland, although the subject had been included in previous census data for Northern Ireland. Although their methodologies differ greatly, the numbers collected by individual religious communities highlight patterns of adherence and belief.

The 2001 Census reports that approximately 42 million persons (almost 72 percent of the population) identify themselves as Christians. Approximately 1.6 million (2.7 percent) identify themselves as Muslims. The next largest religious groups are Hindus (1 percent), followed by Sikhs (0.6 percent) and Jews (0.5 percent). Over

nine million (15.5 percent) of those responding stated they have no religion. The Census's religion question was voluntary, but only 7.3 percent chose not to respond.

Information on membership in Christian denominations was not recorded in the 2001 census. The Office for National Statistics 2003 yearbook indicates approximately 29 percent of the population identify with Anglican churches, 10 percent with the Roman Catholic Church, and 14 percent with other Christian churches. An additional 2 percent of the population is affiliated with the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Church of Christ, Christian Scientists, and Unitarians.

In Northern Ireland, the 2001 Census showed that 53.1 percent were Protestants and 43.8 were Catholics. Church attendance in Northern Ireland is estimated at 30 to 35 percent. The divisions between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland have largely evolved along religious lines. The policy of the Government remains one of religious neutrality and tolerance.

Catholics and Protestants continue to live in segregated communities in Northern Ireland, particularly in public housing ("housing estates") and other working class areas, although many middle class neighborhoods are mixed communities. Intimidation by paramilitary gangs often results in members of the minority community leaving housing estates, increasing the level of segregation.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The law provides for the freedom to change one's religion or belief. The 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act covers "religiously aggravated offenses," based on existing assault, harassment, criminal damage, and public order offenses. Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" face higher maximum penalties where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime. Since the law took effect in December 2001, the police have sent 40 such cases to the Crown Prosecution Service. Although many of these remain ongoing, as of mid-July 2003, there were 11 convictions.

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. In June 2003, a nongovernmental Commission on the Future of the Monarchy called for the Queen to be stripped of the title of Supreme Governor. The Commission, which was set up by the Fabian Society and enjoys the full cooperation of the monarchy, explained that severing the links between the monarch and the Anglican Church would better reflect the religious and ethnic diversity in the country.

The monarch appoints Church of England officials on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Crown Appointments Commission, which includes lay and clergy representatives. The Church of Scotland appoints its own office bearers, and its affairs are not subject to any civil authority. The Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of Ireland are members of the Anglican Communion. There are no established churches in Wales or Northern Ireland. A February 2001 Home Office Research Study suggested that the establishment status of the Church of England causes "religious disadvantage" to other religious communities. Those who believe that their freedom of religion has been infringed have the right to appeal to the courts for relief.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. No church or religious organization—established or otherwise—receives direct funding from the State. Religious bodies are expected to finance their own activities through endowment, investments, and fund-raising. The Government funds the repair of historic church buildings, such as cathedrals, but such funding is not restricted to Church of England buildings. A Government grants program helps to fund repair and maintenance of listed places of worship of all religions nationwide. The Government also contributes to the budget of the Church Conservation Trust, which preserves "redundant" Church of England buildings of architectural or historic significance. Several similar groups in England, Scotland, and Wales repair non-Anglican houses of worship.

Most religious institutions are classified as charities and, as such, enjoy a wide range of tax benefits. (The advancement of religion is considered to be a charitable purpose.) In England and Wales, the Charity Commission reviews the application of each body applying for registration as a charity. Commissioners base their deci-

sions on a substantial body of case law. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Inland Revenue performs this task. Charities are exempt from taxes on most types of income and capital gains, provided that the charity uses the income or gains for charitable purposes. They also are exempt from the value-added tax.

The Government provides funding for a large number of so-called "faith schools." As of June, there were 6,938 state-funded schools with a religious character in England. The majority of these schools are Anglican and Catholic schools, but there is also a well-established tradition of state support for Jewish and Methodist schools. The Government has helped set up and fund a number of schools reflecting other religious traditions. These include four Muslim, two Sikh, one Greek Orthodox, and one Seventh-day Adventist school.

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support. In Northern Ireland, over 90 percent of students attend schools that are either predominantly Catholic or Protestant. Integrated schools serve approximately 5 percent of school-aged children whose families voluntarily choose this option, often after overcoming significant obstacles to provide the resources to start a new school and demonstrate its sustainability for three years before government funding begins. Demand for places in integrated schools far outweighs the limited number of places available.

The law requires religious education in publicly maintained schools throughout the country. According to the Education Reform Act of 1988, it forms part of the core curriculum for students in England and Wales (the requirements for Scotland were outlined in the Education Act of 1980.) The shape and content of religious instruction is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed syllabi are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity, while taking account of the teachings and practices of other principal religions in the country. Syllabi must be nondenominational and refrain from attempting to convert pupils.

In addition, schools have to provide a daily act of collective worship. In practice this action mainly is Christian in character, reflecting Christianity's importance in the religious life of the country. This requirement may be waived if a school's administration deems it inappropriate for some or all of the students. All parents have the right to withdraw a child from religious education, but the schools must approve this request. Under some circumstances, non-Christian worship may instead be allowed. Teachers' organizations have criticized school prayer and called for a government review of the practice.

Where a substantial population of religious minorities characterizes a student body, schools may observe the religious festivals of other faiths. Schools also endeavor to accommodate religious requirements, such as providing halal meat for Muslim children.

The Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion by public authorities. In Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment Act specifically bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. All public sector employers and all private firms with more than 10 employees must report annually to the Equality Commission on the religious composition of their workforces and must review their employment practices every 3 years. Noncompliance may result in criminal penalties and the loss of government contracts. Victims of employment discrimination may sue for damages. In June Parliament approved the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations of 2003, which adopted a European Commission Directive against religious discrimination. The regulations, which are scheduled to enter into effect on December 2, 2003, prohibit employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a "genuine occupational requirement" of a religious nature. The regulations specifically 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. In June the Department of Health issued new guidance for chaplaincy services in National Health Service hospitals that included interfaith support as a key role for chaplains.

In addition, the 1998 Northern Ireland Act stipulates that all public authorities must show due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, including on the basis of religious belief. Each public authority must report its plans to promote equality to the Equality Commission, which is to review such plans every 5 years.

In June the Home Office opened its Faith Communities Unit, which is charged with promoting interfaith contact and improving government exchange with reli-

gious communities. The Faith Communities Unit is also undertaking a project of “faith literacy,” to improve government employees’ understanding of different religious communities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Due to the limited broadcast spectrum, the 1990 Broadcasting Act precludes certain groups, including those “wholly or mainly of a religious nature,” from obtaining the few available national licenses. Religious groups are not restricted from owning a range of local and regional broadcast licenses—including licenses for local digital radio, local and regional analog radio, cable and satellite channels—whose frequencies are more numerous and, therefore, not subject to provisions regarding broad audience appeal.

The Government does not recognize Scientology as a religion for the purposes of charity law. Scientology ministers are not considered ministers of religion for the purpose of immigration relations. Scientology chapels do not qualify as places of worship under the law. The Prison Service does not consider Scientology as a religion and does not recognize it for the purpose of facilitating prison visits by ministers. However, prisoners who are adherents of Scientology are free to register their adherence to Scientology; this is recorded on their records. The Prison Service seeks to accommodate Scientologists’ requests for visits from Scientology ministers by affording extra visiting privileges to prisoners who profess adherence to Scientology.

The Unification Church has attempted to have the ban on travel to the United Kingdom of its leader, Reverend Sun Myung Moon, lifted. While the Home Office has stated that Reverend Moon’s presence would not be expected to generate any large-scale public disorder, on May 15, they sent a letter to Reverend Moon informing him that he should not attempt to enter the country based on the grounds that his “presence there would not be conducive to the public good for reasons of public order.”

Other than the House of Lords, membership in a given religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents. The Anglican Archbishops of York and Canterbury; the Bishops of Durham, London, and Winchester; and 21 other bishops, in order of seniority, receive automatic membership in the House of Lords, whereas prominent clergy from other denominations or religions are not afforded this privilege. The Removal of Clergy Disqualification Act 2001 removed restrictions that prohibited all clergy ordained by an Anglican bishop, as well as ministers of the Church of Scotland, from seeking or holding membership in the House of Commons.

While not enforced and essentially a legal anachronism, blasphemy against Anglican doctrine remains technically illegal. Several religious organizations, in association with the Commission for Racial Equality, are attempting to abolish the law or broaden its protection to include all faiths. In June 2003, the House of Lords Select Committee on Religious Offenses published a report on its deliberations on a possible repeal of the Law on Blasphemy. The report, while failing to reach a clear conclusion, recommended that Parliament should consider arguments for leaving the blasphemy law as it stands, even though its use might become increasingly uncommon, but also seek ways of expressing in law the need for protection of all faiths.

A February 2001 report commissioned by the Home Office found that some religious groups, particularly those identified with ethnic minorities, reported unfair treatment on the basis of their religious belief. Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and blacked Christian churches were more likely to report problems ranging from lack of recognition or inclusion of religious beliefs in education to discrimination or lack of accommodation of religious beliefs by employers.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is not required to conform to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act of 1998, which provides that “a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.” In relation to their percentage of the Northern Ireland population (44 percent), Catholics are underrepresented in the PSNI. The Police (Northern Ireland) Act of 2000, which incorporates many of the recommendations of the 1999 Patten Commission Report, mandates measures designed to expand Catholic representation in the PSNI. Measures to increase Catholic representation in the PSNI include the establishment of an independent recruitment agency and a recruitment policy mandating equal intake of qualified Catholics and non-Catholics. The 50/50 recruitment policy has been implemented, with the first class of recruits reflecting this policy graduating in April 2002. By the end of the reporting period, the PSNI was compiling statistics on the proportion of Catho-

lics and Protestants in its ranks, and intends to make them available by the end of August.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In Northern Ireland, where centuries-old sectarian divisions persist between the Protestant and Catholic communities, political and cultural differences contributed to problems between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland.

In 1998 the majority of citizens (72 percent) in Northern Ireland voted to support the Good Friday Agreement, which aims to create a lasting settlement to the conflict in Northern Ireland and a society based on equality of opportunity and human rights.

The police in Northern Ireland reported approximately 79 attacks against both Catholic and Protestant churches, schools, and meeting halls in 2002. Such sectarian violence often coincides with heightened tensions during the spring and summer marching season. However, the 2003 marching season was the least contentious in many years, with no major incidents of interface violence. Negotiations involving members of "Loyal Institutions" (the Royal Black Preceptory, Orange Order, and Apprentice Boys, whose membership almost exclusively is Protestant), local leaders in nationalist areas, NGOs and government and police officials helped ensure public order.

From July 2001 through June 2003, the Community Security Trust recorded 351 anti-Semitic incidents in the country. These included 31 assaults and 28 instances of desecration and damage to property. The media also reported instances of desecration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. In May vandals desecrated 386 graves at a Jewish cemetery in East London. In December 2002, vandals desecrated graves with swastikas in the Jewish section of a cemetery in Milton Keynes. In October 2002, vandals attacked the Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation Synagogue in Edinburgh.

Advocacy groups report an increase in negative attitudes towards Islam and attacks against Muslims in the country after September 11, 2001. In the fall of 2001, there were isolated attacks against Muslims. Targets included persons wearing traditional Islamic dress, and buildings such as mosques and Muslim-owned businesses. The London-based Islamic Human Rights Commission reported 344 incidents of violence against Muslims in the year after September 11, 2001, including at least three clubbing incidents with bats, the attack of a child with pepper spray, and the stabbing of a Muslim woman. The Government quickly condemned the violence and responded by including "religiously aggravated offenses" as part of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act 2001.

Isolated incidents targeting Muslims took place during the period covered by this report, including assaults and acts of vandalism. According to the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism, a London-based monitoring group, anti-Islamic sentiments may have sparked rioting in June between local youths and predominantly Muslim Kurdish refugees in Wrexham, North Wales; the incident left one Kurd hospitalized with a fractured skull. In June a man in Peterborough was convicted of religiously aggravated harassment for distributing leaflets urging violence against Muslims. Also in June, anti-Muslim slogans were painted on walls at Birmingham's Central Mosque soon after the airing of a fictional BBC television program depicting the recruitment of suicide bombers in a Birmingham Mosque. In March vandals attacked Portsmouth's Jami'a Mosque.

Employment discrimination on religious grounds is prohibited by law in Northern Ireland. As a result of the stability generated by the peace process, unemployment in Northern Ireland dropped to 5.1 percent in March, among the lowest level in 30 years. The latest unemployment statistics for 2002 give average unemployment rates for Catholics at 8.05 percent and 4.5 percent for Protestants during the period from Fall 2001 to Summer 2002. According to the 2001 Labor Force Survey Religion Report released in February, the unemployment rate for 2001 for Catholics was 8.3 percent and 4.3 percent for Protestants. In 1993 the unemployment rates were 18.1 percent for Catholics and 9.4 percent for Protestants.

The country has both active interfaith and ecumenical movements. The Council of Christians and Jews works to advance better relations between the two religions

and to combat anti-Semitism. The Interfaith Network links a wide range of religious and educational organizations with an interest in interfaith relations, including the national representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian communities. The Network has a consultative relationship with the Home Office, from which it receives financial support. The Inner Cities Religious Council encourages interfaith activity through regional conferences and support for local initiatives. The nongovernmental organization, "Respect," continues to operate to encourage voluntary time-sharing and mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

The main ecumenical body is the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, which serves as the main forum for interchurch cooperation and collaboration. Interchurch cooperation is not limited to dealings among denominations at the national level. For example, at the local level Anglican parishes may share their church with Roman Catholic congregations.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Embassy encouraged interfaith dialog to promote religious tolerance. In January the Ambassador met with the "Three Faiths Forum's" co-founders and in the Fall 2002, the Ambassador hosted an Iftar dinner for Muslim leaders in the country at the end of Ramadan. In March senior Embassy staff visited London's Ismaili Muslim community. The Embassy's outreach to religious communities continued during the period covered by this report. On the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001, Embassy staff attended a number of remembrance services and events, including the Jewish Association of Cultural Societies, the West London Synagogue, and the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies. In January the Deputy Chief of Mission attended a reception at the Muslim Cultural Center. In February the Ambassador attended the enthronement of the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

In Northern Ireland, longstanding issues related to religion have been part of the political and economic struggle largely between Protestant and Catholic communities. As an active supporter of the peace process, the U.S. Government has encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialog between the two largest religious communities.

UZBEKISTAN

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, in practice the Government restricted this right. The Government permits the existence of mainstream religions, including approved Muslim groups, Jewish groups, the Russian Orthodox Church, and various other denominations, such as Catholics, Lutherans, and Baptists, and generally registers newer religions. Christian churches generally are tolerated as long as they do not attempt to win converts among ethnic Uzbeks. However, the law prohibits or severely restricts activities such as proselytizing, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering private religious instruction.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued its harsh campaign against unauthorized Islamic groups it suspected of extremist sentiments or activities. The Government arrested numerous alleged members of these groups and sentenced them to lengthy jail terms. Most of these were suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, a banned extremist Islamic political party. The number arrested has continued to decline, but remains high. During the period covered by this report, the Government released 923 such individuals in the second of 2 large-scale amnesties. Approximately 25 women were arrested and tried for participating in or organizing demonstrations demanding the release of male relatives on suspicion of Islamic extremism. A number of minority religious groups, including congregations of a variety of Christian confessions, had difficulty satisfying the strict registration requirements set out by the law. Some underground mosques, such as those that were tolerated during the Soviet Union, began to operate again in 2002. This trend has continued; however, religious authorities and the security services monitor them closely.

The generally amicable relationship among religions contributed to religious freedom; however, harassment of ethnic Uzbek Christians continued on some occasions. Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to circulate strongly anti-Semitic leaflets, the text of many

of which originate from sources outside the country; however, these views are not seen as representative of the sentiments of the vast majority of the country's population.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting 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.

SECTION I. RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY

The country has a total land area of 117,868 square miles and its population is approximately 25,563,000. There are no official statistics on membership in various faiths; however, it is estimated that 88 percent of the population are nominally Muslim. Approximately 9 percent of the population nominally are Russian Orthodox; this percentage is steadily declining as the number of ethnic Russians remaining in the country has decreased. A growing number of individuals from these two faiths practice their religion, and outside of Tashkent, Muslim believers may now outnumber non-believers. Since 1991, when the country gained independence from the Soviet Union, there has been a resurgence, particularly in the Fergana Valley and the country's southern provinces, of the Hanafi School of Sunni Islam, traditional in the region. During the decades of Soviet rule, most persons did not practice religion openly; however, it remained an important cultural factor in the lives of many, particularly Muslims.

An estimated 30,000 Ashkenazi and Bukharan Jews remain in the country, concentrated in the main cities of Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. Almost 70,000 have emigrated to Israel or the United States since independence. The remaining 3 percent of the population include small communities of Korean Christians, Baptists, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Hare Krishnas.

The law prohibits proselytizing, which tends to constrain the activities of foreign missionaries, particularly those who seek to minister among the country's Muslim population. In practice, many foreign missionaries ignore this restriction. There is no significant immigrant community.

SECTION II. STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, in practice the Government restricted these rights. The Government is secular and there is no official state religion.

Although the laws treat all religious confessions equally, the Government shows its support for the country's Muslim heritage by funding an Islamic university and subsidizing citizens' participation in the Hajj. The Government promotes a moderate version of Islam through the control and financing of the Spiritual Directorate for Muslims (the Muftiate), which in turn controls the Islamic hierarchy, the content of imams' sermons, and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations requires all religious groups and congregations to register and provides strict and burdensome criteria for their registration. Among its requirements, the law, using juridical citizenship, stipulates that each group must present a list of at least 100 citizen members to the local branches of the Ministry of Justice. This provision enables the Government to ban any group simply by finding technical grounds for denying its registration petition. This has had the effect of suppressing the activities of those Muslims who seek to worship outside the system of state-sponsored mosques. A special commission may grant exemptions to the Religion Laws' strict requirements and register groups that have not been registered by local officials. The commission has granted exemptions to 51 such groups, including congregations with fewer than 100 citizen members. However, no formal procedures or criteria have been established to bring a case before this commission, and the commission has not met in over 2 years.

To register, groups also must report in their charter a valid legal address. Local officials on occasion have denied approval of a legal address in order to prevent Christian churches from registering. The Ministry of Justice also has cited this requirement in explaining local officials' decisions. Although church leaders cite high registration fees and the 100-member rule as obstacles, the most frequent problem is the lack of an approved legal address. Some groups have been reluctant to invest in the purchase of a property without assurance that the registration would be approved. Others claim that local officials arbitrarily withhold approval of the address-

es because they oppose the existence of Christian churches with ethnic Uzbek members.

Some churches have applied for registration and were denied or never received an official answer, including the Greater Grace Christian Church of Samarkand, the International Church of Tashkent, the Mir (Peace) Presbyterian Church in Nukus, the United Church of Evangelical Christians/Baptists in Tashkent, the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Andijan, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Some churches, particularly evangelical churches with ethnic Uzbek members, generally do not apply for registration because they do not believe local officials will register them. Other groups, including those with too few members, have reported that they prefer not to bring themselves to the attention of authorities by submitting a registration application that on its face does not meet legal requirements. There also are a few groups that refuse on principle to seek registration, because they challenge the Government's right to require registration.

As of June 26, the Government had registered 2,119 religious congregations and organizations, 1,931 of which were Muslim. This represents an increase of 72 and 68 since the last reporting period. The 188 registered minority religious groups include: 62 Korean Christian, 36 Russian Orthodox, 20 Pentecostal ("Full Gospel"), 24 Baptist, 11 Seventh-day Adventist, 7 Jewish, 7 Baha'i, 4 Lutheran, 4 "New Apostolic," 5 Roman Catholic, 2 Jehovah's Witnesses, 2 Krishna Consciousness groups, 1 Bible Society, and 1 Armenian Apostolic.

According to 2000 statistics, 335 applications were denied, 323 of which were from Muslim groups. The number of mosques has increased significantly from the approximately 80 permitted during the Soviet era, but has decreased from more than 4,000 that opened after the country gained independence and before registration procedures were in place. The Government reported that it no longer releases statistics on the denial rate of religious organizations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were significant governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government, by continuing to deny registration to some religious organizations, deprived them of their legal right to worship. The Government restricted many religious practices and activities and punished some citizens because they engaged in religious practices and activities that were in violation of the registration laws. Ethnic Russians, Jews, and foreigners generally enjoy greater religious freedom than traditionally Muslim ethnic groups, particularly ethnic Uzbeks. Christian churches generally are tolerated as long as they do not attempt to win converts among ethnic Uzbeks. Christians who are ethnic Uzbeks are often secretive about their faith and sometimes do not attempt to register their organizations. Christian congregations that are of mixed ethnic background often face difficulties in registering or are reluctant to list their ethnic Uzbek members on registration lists for fear of incurring official displeasure.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations provides for freedom of worship, freedom from religious persecution, separation of church and state, and the right to establish schools and train clergy; however, the law also severely limits religious activity. It restricts religious rights that are judged to be in conflict with national security, prohibits proselytizing, bans religious subjects in public schools, prohibits the private teaching of religious principles, and requires religious groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials. Article 14 of the law prohibits the wearing of "cult robes" in public places by all except "those serving in religious organizations." This vague provision does not appear to have been enforced during the period covered by this report.

The Criminal and Civil codes contain stiff penalties for violating the Religion Law and other statutes on religious activities. Prohibited activities include organizing an illegal religious group, persuading others to join such a group, and drawing minors into a religious organization without the permission of their parents. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. The Law prohibits groups that do not have a registered religious center from training religious personnel. There are seven such registered religious groups. In practice, these restrictions contravene most internationally recognized standards of religious freedom.

The Government, for national security reasons, has conducted an intensely repressive campaign against persons perceived as Islamic extremists. The result is an atmosphere of intimidation in which many young Muslim men say they do not feel safe even observing basic religious duties such as praying five times each day. This pressure is uneven. For example, government workers generally feel less free to perform their religious responsibilities than do independent small traders. However, officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are allowed to pray at work if they wish. The Criminal Code formally distinguishes between "illegal" groups, which are those

that are not registered properly, and “prohibited” groups, which are banned altogether. The code makes it a criminal offense punishable by up to 5 years in prison to organize an illegal religious group or to resume the activities of such a group, possibly after being denied registration or ordered to disband. In addition, the code punishes any participation in such a group with up to 3 years in prison. The code also provides for penalties of up to 20 years in prison and confiscation of property for “organizing or participating” in the activities of religious extremist, fundamentalist, separatist, or other prohibited groups. In practice, the courts ignore the theoretical distinction between illegal and prohibited groups and frequently convict members of disapproved Muslim groups under both statutes.

While supportive of moderate Muslims, the Government is intolerant of Islamic groups it perceives to be extremist. A small but growing number of unofficial, independent mosques are allowed to operate quietly under the watch of official imams. Some sources have claimed that imams of registered mosques are required to submit lists of individuals in their congregations who may have extremist tendencies. There have also been reports that in some areas, mahalla (neighborhood) committees and—in rarer instances—imams have come under pressure to provide names of persons who pray daily. Observers claim that this has led to a tendency on the part of some imams to submit names of unusually devout believers, who may have no extremist tendencies. There were credible reports that the heads of mahalla committees have told people to say their daily prayers quietly at home to avoid the mahalla reporting them to the security services for unusual devotion. The Government controls the content of imams’ sermons and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials. Use of loudspeakers in mosque minarets was highly discouraged following a series of February 1999 bombings that the Government blamed on Islamic extremists. A 1998 fatwa from the Mufti of Uzbekistan—one meant simply to control the volume of the loudspeakers—was misinterpreted as justification for discouraging their use after the Tashkent 1999 bombings. During the reporting period, loudspeakers were used.

The Government is determined to prevent the spread of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Although Hizb ut-Tahrir maintains that it is committed to non-violence, its members seek to replace secular governments, including in Uzbekistan, with an Islamic one, part of a world-wide Islamic government called the Caliphate. The organization’s literature includes strong anti-Semitic and anti-Western rhetoric. Hizb ut-Tahrir is illegal in Germany, as well as in Pakistan, and some other Islamic countries. Hizb ut-Tahrir has not been implicated in violent activities in the country; however, the organization calls on the armed forces of Muslim nations to overthrow their rulers and reserves the possibility that its own members might resort to violence in the establishment of the caliphate.

In the spring of 2002, President Islam Karimov reaffirmed on national television his intention to eradicate Hizb ut-Tahrir. Persons accused of involvement with the organization, which often involves nothing more extensive than having attended one of its meetings or passing along banned Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets, continued to be subject to prison sentences of up to 15 years.

The Government is also determined to prevent the growth of other extremist Islamic organizations and of extremist forms of Islam that it broadly labels under the rubric of Wahhabism. The authorities appear to suspect Muslims who meet privately to pray or study Islam of being extremists. People accused of Wahhabism faced persecution ranging from job loss to long imprisonment.

Religious groups are prohibited from forming political parties and social movements.

The Government’s harsh treatment of suspected religious extremists has generally tended to suppress outward expressions of religious piety. Most young men do not wear beards, because the Government regards them as a sign of extremism. Although many young men attend Friday prayers, hardly any are bearded.

Unlike during the previous reporting period, there has been increased tolerance for the use of head coverings by Muslim women.

The Koran, prayer, and observance of Islamic holidays are banned in certain prisons, particularly those with prisoners believed to be Islamic extremists. Prisoners suspected of Islamic extremism face religious insults and significant barriers to observing religious obligations.

In general, any Muslim religious activity outside the registered mosques is closely monitored. A small but growing number of unofficial, independent mosques are allowed to operate quietly under the watch of official imams.

Some mosques continue to have difficulty registering. The Panjera mosque in Navoi has been trying unsuccessfully for the past 5 years to register. According to believers, they have submitted documents every year but have not received a response. Approximately 500 people meet for prayer at the mosque on feast days.

The ban on proselytizing results in fines and sometimes in the denial of registration. Local authorities have continued to block the registration of evangelical Christian congregations in Tashkent, Samarkand, Guliston, Gazalkent, Andijan, Karakalpakstan, and Novaya Zhizn. The head of the Guliston branch of the Ministry of Justice allegedly told leaders of an evangelical church there that Christianity was not needed and that they should leave Uzbekistan. The International Church of Tashkent, a Protestant non-denominational church that ministers exclusively to Tashkent's international community, has been unable to obtain registration, despite several years of efforts. It continues to experience difficulties renting a place of worship. As a result, the congregation meets in a Chinese restaurant.

In addition, the Hushhabbar ("Good News") Church in Guliston, which has many ethnic Uzbek members, reported that in August 2002 local Ministry of Justice officials tore up its registration documents and in March rejected the application. A Pentecostal church in Andijan has been denied registration for more than 1 year. Its leader says that local authorities have cited his conversion of ethnic Uzbeks as a major problem. The Peace Presbyterian Church in Nukus has been unable to obtain registration, despite repeated efforts. The Baptist Church in Gazalkent remains unable to obtain registration. Church leaders report that officials cite a multitude of reasons for refusing to register them, ranging from claims of falsified congregation lists to improper certification by fire inspectors. All of these churches have ethnic Uzbek members in their congregations.

A Baptist church with the International Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians/Baptists, a denomination that rejects registration on principle and has ethnic Uzbek members in Mubarek, came under intense pressure over the past year for refusing to register.

The Catholic Church has largely solved its problems with authorities, and three parishes have been registered (one each in Tashkent, Fergana, and Nukus). The Nukus parish was registered during the period covered by this report.

The Jehovah's Witnesses focused their registration efforts on obtaining registration in Tashkent. By the end of the reporting period, only 2 of the church's 11 congregations were registered. The churches in Chirchik and Fergan were registered in November 2002. Internal police training documents list the Jehovah's Witnesses, along with the terrorist Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb ut-Tahrir, as security threats. Quasi-governmental think tanks in Tashkent have called the Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist threat, and both local and central political authorities have expressed their fear that the denomination is dangerous.

Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. According to an unconfirmed Forum 18 news service reports, in early October 2002, police raided the Mir (Peace) Presbyterian Church in Karakalpakstan. The church leaders reported that police forced ethnic Karakalpak and Uzbek members of the congregation to write statements indicating the reason for their attendance. In November 2002, police raided the Baptist church in Gulistan. The pastor, Boris Akrachkov, was accused of performing religious activities without registration, found guilty, and fined. Authorities in Samarkand continued during the reporting period to insist that Greater Grace would be registered if the congregation chose a local pastor and got rid of their foreign pastor. In May the church was also informed that registration would be facilitated if it did not accept funding from non-residents.

In May 2002, the Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA) told a group of evangelical pastors that they no longer would be allowed to preach in the Uzbek language—the official national language and the one identified most closely with the majority Muslim population. This issue has not been fully resolved. The control over publication and distribution of religious literature has been used to restrict the distribution of Bibles in the Uzbek language; however, the CRA has made some concessions on publication and distribution of Uzbek-language Bibles.

The Government requires that the religious censor approve all religious literature; however, in practice a number of other government entities concerned with religion have a chance to suppress religious literature that they do not approve. The CRA, in accordance with the law, has given the right to publish, import, and distribute religious literature solely to registered central offices of religious organizations. Seven such offices have been registered to date: A nondenominational Bible society; 2 Islamic centers; and Russian Orthodox, Full Gospel, Baptist, and Roman Catholic offices. However, the Government discourages and occasionally has blocked registered central offices from producing or importing Christian literature in the Uzbek language even though Bibles in many other languages are available in Tashkent bookstores. Religious literature imported illegally is subject to confiscation and destruction.

The Muftiate sporadically issues an updated list of all officially sanctioned Islamic literature. The list contains more than 200 titles. Bookstores are not allowed to sell

Islamic literature that does not appear on the list; however, in practice Islamic bookstores in Tashkent sell a large number of titles not included on the list, including those in the Arabic language. More controversial literature, when available, is not displayed on shelves. Possession of literature by authors deemed to be extremist may lead to arrest and prosecution. Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets are categorically prohibited.

In 2003 the Government allowed former Mufti Mohammed Sodiq to publish two religious volumes that previously had been considered too controversial. The Mufti has openly criticized the Government's heavy-handed repression of extremism, arguing that education and openness are the only sure means of ensuring that moderate Islam triumphs.

There were no reports of the confiscation of foreign Islamic literature during the period covered by this report. However, in December 2002, police reportedly seized religious literature from the private home of a Tashkent Baptist church member. In April a shipment of several hundred illegally imported, Russian-language copies of the Baptist magazine *Herald of Truth* was confiscated and burned.

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.

The law prohibits the teaching of religious subjects in schools, the private teaching of religious principles, and the teaching of religion to minors without parental consent. In April, authorities began an investigation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Gazalkent for teaching local children and for proselytizing. In March authorities investigated a Baptist pastor in Yangiyul for holding a religious service in the home of one of his congregation (rather than in the church itself). In November 2002, an administrative court case was brought against a Baptist pastor in Guliston for the private teaching of religion (the pastor's church was not officially registered, and hence its services were considered "private teaching"). In December 2002, police raided a private apartment belonging to a member of a Baptist church in the Khamzin district of Tashkent, where a number of adult church members and ten of their children were preparing for Christmas celebrations. The adults were taken to the police station and later accused of teaching religion to children. Members and leaders of several churches, including the Khamzin Baptist Church, the Guliston Hushhabbar Church, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, have reported that local officials have provided school officials with lists of those children whose parents had converted to Christianity. School officials reportedly harassed those children. In February, a group of police officers raided a private apartment in Khojali where 10 Baptist women of local ethnicities were gathered for a Christian meeting. Police reportedly insulted them and detained them for 27 hours.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government continued to commit numerous serious abuses of religious freedom. The Government's campaign against extremist Muslim groups, begun in the early 1990s, following a Government effort to encourage a rebirth of Islam in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, resulted in numerous serious human rights abuses during the period covered by this report. The campaign was directed at three types of Muslims: alleged Wahhabists, including those educated at madrassas (schools) abroad and followers of Imam Nazarov of Tashkent and missing Imam Mirzaev of Andijon; those suspected of being involved in the 1999 Tashkent bombings or of being involved with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), whose roots are in Namangan; and suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir throughout the country. The campaign resulted in the arrest of many observant Muslims who were not extremists. The campaign also resulted in allegations that hundreds, perhaps thousands, have been physically mistreated or tortured; dozens of these allegations have been confirmed.

After various brands of extremist political Islam began to appear in the country in the early 1990s, conservative Islamic social practices began to emerge. In response, the Government launched a severely repressive campaign against extremist political Islam, which it had determined was an unacceptable threat to stability. Following both the 1997 murder of police officials in Namangan and the 1999 terrorist bombings in Tashkent, police detained hundreds and perhaps thousands of suspected Wahhabists. The majority of those detained were released after questioning and detention that lasted as long as 2 months, but some were convicted; of these, the whereabouts of a small number remain undisclosed. Several of those detained and released report ongoing health problems, such as the aftermath of heart attacks suffered during detention, kidney damage, and brain trauma. The mother and wives of one family of detainees in the late 1990s were held under house arrest, deprived of their clothing, sexually abused, and humiliated, and their household goods were stolen; the mother continues to be followed and harassed. One woman

reported that all of her sons along with all the males in her village between the age of 16 and 45 were detained and accused of "Wahhabism." Her husband was returned unable to talk, one son died in prison, and the rest she fears may be dead, as she has not heard from them in four years. She continues to be followed and severely harassed by local law enforcement officials.

Individuals arrested on suspicion of extremism often face severe mistreatment. There were credible reports that three known members of Hizb ut-Tahrir died in custody as a result of torture and beatings. Law enforcement officials often beat and torture suspects held in pretrial detention—including those accused of religious extremism—in order to extract confessions. Prisoners convicted of extremism are often subjected to particularly harsh prison regimens and conditions of confinement. Although there is specific information available on only a few deaths from torture in custody, human rights and other observers credibly report that a large number of prisoners throughout the country died of diseases directly related to the conditions of their confinement during the period covered by this report.

The Government does not consider repression of persons suspected of extremism to be a matter of religious freedom, but instead to be directed against those who want to foment armed resistance to the Government. However, authorities are highly suspicious of those who are more observant than is the norm, including frequent mosque attendees, bearded men, and veiled women. In practice this approach results in abuses against observant Muslims for their religious beliefs. It may also serve to radicalize some young men and women who otherwise might practice their religion in a politically neutral manner.

The investigation into the May death of a Hizb ut-Tahrir member remained ongoing at year's end. In March a member of an evangelical Christian church in Karakalpakstan died of heart failure hours after police badly beat him at a local police station. There was no investigation into the 2002 torture deaths of two persons convicted of Hizb ut-Tahrir members.

Other reports of physical abuses include the December 2002 beating by local police of two Pentecostals in Muinak and their subsequent imprisonment for 5 days. Also in March, police beat a 17-year-old member of Jehovah's Witness in Bukhara region for having religious literature in his possession. There was an unconfirmed report that 22 women imprisoned in Tashkent complained in an open letter to the Government dated in April of being imprisoned on trumped-up charges of "undermining the constitutional system of the Republic." The women complained of their treatment in prison and of being prevented from praying and other religious practices.

In early 2003, local authorities reportedly harassed four Hare Krishna devotees in Fergana for having lunch together.

Arbitrary arrest and detention of Muslim believers on charges that they belong to Hizb ut-Tahrir or Wahhabist organizations remained a problem. Various estimates from credible sources suggest that as many as 5,000 of the estimated 5,700 to 6,200 political prisoners being held in detention are members of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Estimates of numbers of arrests vary from slightly fewer than the previous reporting period to about the same number, but in either case well below the highs from 1999 to 2001. Even in cases where individuals are members of the party or other extremist organizations, the authorities sometimes failed to produce credible evidence that the individuals committed acts for which they allegedly were arrested.

Family members of individuals wanted in connection with Islamic activities, or already jailed in connection with those activities, often are harassed or arrested. In some cases, the relatives themselves are involved in what the Government considers illegal religious activities, but in many cases the relatives' guilt is only by association.

Approximately 25 women were tried for participating in or organizing demonstrations demanding the release of male relatives jailed on suspicion of Islamic extremism; several of the women were convicted but received suspended sentences.

The police routinely planted narcotics, ammunition, and, beginning in 1999, religious leaflets, on citizens to justify their arrests. According to human rights activists, the police arrested many of those whose religious observance, sometimes indicated by their dress or beards, made them suspect to the security services. Most human rights groups agree that the number of individuals who remain in prison, after being arrested and convicted for political or religious reasons, is between 5,700 and 6,200.

Prisoners suspected of Islamic extremism are often prohibited or prevented from praying regularly, possessing a Koran, and observing religious obligations such as the Ramaddan fast. Those who persist are reportedly subjected to punishment. Human rights activists have reported numerous cases of persons convicted of extre-

mism who have been punished harshly for refusing to accept moderate interpretations of Islam presented by imams visiting their prisons.

In March and April, local police and officials from the local offices of the Ministry of Justice and the CRA, interrupted Greater Grace Christian Church's religious services. Congregation members were asked to provide contact information, and several church leaders were taken to the local police station for further questioning. An assistant pastor with Turkmen citizenship has been fined and threatened with jail. Bakhtier Tuichiev, the pastor of the Full Gospel Pentecostal church in Andijan, was summoned to the regional internal affairs administration in January and April where he was warned that unless he halted church activities, a case would be brought against him for operating without registration. Even congregants meeting socially have been known to come under pressure.

According to news reports, members of some Christian evangelical congregations were detained during the year, including leaders of Mir (peace) Presbyterian Church, Boris Akrachkov (Pastor of a baptist Church in Gulistan), Nikolai Obyedkov (Pastor of a baptist church in Yangiyul), members of a Baptist church in Khamzin, Bakhtier Tuichiev (Pastor of the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Andijan), and Matti Sirvio (the Finnish pastor of the Greater Grace Church in Samarkand), among others. Several were criminally indicted. Only one Christian evangelical was convicted for his religious activities, and he was handed a suspended sentence.

Members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were also subjected to police questioning, searches, and administrative fines. In November 2002, in a case that generated intense international pressure, Marat Mudarisov, a leader of the Jehovah's Witnesses received a 3-year suspended sentence. He was detained in July 2002 after the police raided a private apartment where 13 members of Jehovah's Witnesses, including Mudarisov, had gathered. Religious literature was confiscated and all present were arrested. However, a criminal case against another member of Jehovah's Witnesses was dropped, and a criminal investigation against a third was dropped. In November 2002, Mars Munasypov was arrested and jailed for proselytizing. A month later he was found guilty of teaching religion but was immediately amnestied. In May four members of Jehovah's Witnesses were detained in Kogan (Bukhara province) while proselytizing door to door. They reported that police, including the city police chief, beat them. Criminal cases were pending against two members of Jehovah's Witnesses, 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

Authorities have allowed unregistered mosques to reopen throughout the country, both in cities and in the countryside. In addition, unofficial imams began working, particularly in rural areas, under the close watch of religious officials. Following the 1999 Tashkent bombings, most such unregistered mosques had been shut down. These mosques, many of which had been functioning underground throughout the Soviet period, served the spiritual needs of the people in ways that the large, registered mosques were often unable to do. The unregistered mosques first began to reopen sometime in late 2001 or early 2002.

In March, the Government completed an amnesty of 923 political prisoners, some of whom were convicted of Islamic extremism. This followed an amnesty in late 2001 of 860 such prisoners. Meanwhile, according to multiple sources, new arrests of suspected extremists have slowed considerably.

In the first half of 2003, after years of banning his writings, the Government allowed former Mufti Mohammed Sodiq Mohammed Yusuf to publish two books on Islam. Muhammad Yusuf broke from the Government in 1993, insisting that its attempts to control the content of Islam were counterproductive and only fed extremism. He has argued that greater opportunities for religious education are the only hope for ensuring that the people have a proper understanding of Islam.

The Government also began a small religious education pilot program in elementary schools. In a small number of schools around the country, Islam and Arabic are now being taught several times a week. The teaching of religion in schools, as well as to minors without their parents' permission, has been banned since early Soviet times.

Imams of registered mosques have been dispatched to prisons, where they have met with prisoners convicted of extremism. While the effect of these visits has been undermined by the actions of prison authorities (prisoners who argue with the

imams have reportedly been subject to severe mistreatment), the visits themselves are a welcome move. Imams have also met with amnestied prisoners convicted of extremism upon their return to their communities. Previously, no known attempts were made to persuade suspected extremists with religious instruction.

In June 2002, three National Security Service officers were sentenced to between 4 and 15 years imprisonment for the murder of a suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir member. This followed the January 2002 conviction of four police officers for a similar incident.

There were reports that at least one university began readmitting women who were expelled in 1997 and 1998 for wearing the hijab, a Muslim head covering. During the reporting period, it was more common to see women wearing the hijab and, less frequently, the veil on the street. Unlike in the past, there were no reports of women being expelled from either university or secondary school for wearing religious dress during the period covered by this report. Older men wearing prayer robes are not an uncommon sight.

The CRA submitted the Law on Religion to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office of Democratic Initiatives and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) Panel of Experts on Religious Freedom for analysis of consistency with OSCE agreements.

SECTION III. SOCIETAL ATTITUDES

There are amicable relations among the various religious communities. There is no pattern of discrimination against Jews. Synagogues function openly; Hebrew education, Jewish cultural events, and the publication of a community newspaper take place undisturbed. However, many Jews have emigrated because of bleak economic prospects and because of their connection to families abroad. Anti-Semitic fliers signed by Hizb ut-Tahrir have been distributed throughout the country.

Members of ethnic groups that traditionally are associated with Islam who convert to Christianity sometimes encounter particular familial, societal, and low-level governmental hostility.

Difficulties that evangelical Christian churches and churches with ethnic Uzbeks face are often a reflection of societal attitudes. The Government has increasingly expressed concern that Christian evangelicals will inflame social tensions and has attempted to draw a clear line for such organizations' activities.

SECTION IV. U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

The U.S. Embassy is engaged actively in monitoring religious freedom issues and problems and maintains contact with government and religious leaders and human rights advocates. Members of Congress and other high level legislative and executive branch officials met with Uzbek officials abroad and in the country during the period covered by this report and expressed strong concern on human rights, including the U.S. stance on freedom of religious expression.

The U.S. Ambassador and other embassy officials met with local religious leaders, human rights activists, and Uzbek officials to discuss specific issues of human rights and religious freedom. Officials in Washington met on several occasions with Uzbek embassy officials to convey U.S. concerns regarding the state of religious freedom. Department officials traveled around the country meeting with religious leaders and groups as well as with government officials.

The Embassy's political officers maintain regular contact with the CRA as well as religious leaders and human rights activists. The Embassy sponsored the Chair of the CRA for the International Visitor Program to the U.S. The International Visitor's Program also sponsored the visits of religious leaders and government officials.

The U.S. Embassy intervened on behalf of the Greater Grace Church in Samarkand, the Hushhabbar Church in Guliston, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Tashkent, a Pentecostal church in Andijan, an international non-denominational church in Tashkent, and several faith-based foreign aid organizations.

Embassy officials met with numerous Muslim clergymen and pressed the Government to take action against security forces implicated in the deaths of individuals arrested on suspicion of Islamic extremism. Embassy officials repeatedly urged the Government to allow more freedom of religious expression. This includes repeal of legal provisions prohibiting the private teaching of religion, which the U.S. Government believes is an essential element in preventing further radicalization of young Muslims.