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Russia



International Religious Freedom Report

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. Although the Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and for the separation of church and state, in practice the Government does not always respect the provision for equality of religions.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. Local authorities continued to restrict the rights of some religious minorities in some regions. Despite court decisions which liberalized its interpretation, the complex 1997 "Law on Religion," which replaced a more generous 1990 law, seriously disadvantages religious groups that are new to the country by making it difficult for them to register as religious organizations, and thus obtain the status of juridical person, which includes the right to establish bank accounts, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, and conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals. However, individuals affiliated with unregistered faiths are entitled to rent facilities where religious services can be held.

The Ministry of Justice reported that as of January 31, 2001, more than 20,215 organizations had sought registration or reregistration, and 2095 of these faced the possibility of "liquidation," i.e. deprivation of juridical status. These included large numbers of Muslim congregations, as well as local congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses, the Salvation Army, the Church of Scientology, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), most of which had officially registered national organizations. There were reports that by May 2001 around 100 organizations had been liquidated. The Ministry of Justice stated that most of these were defunct, but religious minority denominations and nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) noted that a number were active and had attempted to reregister. Some of these cases involving active groups were being contested in court as of the end of the period covered by this report.

Contradictions between federal and local law in some regions, and varying interpretations of the law, provide regional officials with pretexts to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Discriminatory practices at the local level are also attributable to the relatively greater susceptibility of local governments to lobbying by majority religions, as well as to discriminatory attitudes that are held widely in society. President Vladimir Putin's articulated desire for greater centralization of power and strengthened rule of law led to some improvements in the area of religious freedom in the regions.

Over the last 2 years there have been indications of a growing convergence between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State. The 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 government employees and military personnel, and, in certain cases, law enforcement and customs decisions, that appear to give it a preferred position. There is evidence that the Procurator General has encouraged local prosecutors to challenge the registration and reregistration of some non-traditional religious groups. In a number of such cases, local courts have upheld the right of non-traditional groups to register or reregister.

The authorities forcibly hospitalized a Unification Church member in a psychiatric ward for 9 days while they attempted to gather evidence against the group. There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in public discussion of their religious views.

While religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens, relations between different religious organizations are frequently tense, particularly at the leadership level, and there continue to be instances of religiously motivated violence. Popular attitudes toward Muslims are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as societal hostility toward newer, non-Orthodox, religions.

The U.S. Government has continued to engage the Government, a number of religious denominations and groups, NGO's, and others in a steady dialog on religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of about 6.5 million square miles and its population is approximately 147.5 million.

There are no reliable statistics that break down the country's population by denomination. Available information suggests that slightly more than half of all inhabitants consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians, although the vast majority are not regular churchgoers. In an opinion poll conducted in February 2000 and published in the newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty* on April 26, 2000, 54 percent of the respondents (of an unknown total number) stated that they were Russian Orthodox, 3 percent Muslims, 0.4 percent Catholic, 0.3 percent Jewish, 1 percent "other religions," and 39 percent atheist or agnostic. However, these statistics do not reflect the considerable growth in the numbers of Protestant believers, many of whose congregations are unregistered. By some estimates, Protestants constitute the third largest group of believers after Orthodox Christians and Muslims. An estimated 600,000 to one million Jews remain in Russia (0.5 percent of the total population) following large-scale emigration over the last two decades. The vast majority of Jews, about 80 percent, live in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

The Ministry of Justice reports that as of the end of January 2001, approximately 18,130 organizations were registered or reregistered, compared with approximately 16,000 in 1987. The number of groups reregistered at that time of the Ministry of Justice report was as follows: Russian Orthodox Church 7,910 groups, Autonomous Russian Orthodox Church 37, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad 20, Ukrainian Orthodox Church 8, Old Believer 171, Roman Catholic 205, Armenian Apostolic 29, Muslim 2,610, Buddhist 110, Jewish 100, Baptist 672, Pentecostal 518, Seventh-Day Adventist 305, Lutheran 167, Apostolic 61, Methodist 53, Presbyterian 107, Anglican 1, Jehovah's Witnesses 203, Salvation Army 4, Mormons 14, Krishna 71, Baha'i 16, Unification Church 2. In addition, 4,739 organizations, which may include both new affiliates of the denominations listed above or new organizations, registered for the first time.

The number of registered religious organizations does not reflect the entire demography of religious believers. For example, as a result of a number of problems related to both intraconfessional disputes and poor administrative procedures on the part of local authorities, an estimated 500 to several thousand Muslim organizations remain unregistered. The registration figures probably also underestimate the number of Pentecostal believers. New Pentecostal organizations are being formed rapidly, and unofficial estimates suggest that there are between 1,500 and 2,000 Pentecostal congregations nationwide, many of which are unregistered. In addition to those listed, the Unification Church has at least 28 other organizations that it is unable to register.

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, although the Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, in practice the Government does not always respect the provision for equality of religions.

In 1990, the Soviet Government adopted a law on religious freedom designed to make all religions equal before the law. (After the breakup of the Soviet Union, this law became part of the Russian Federation's legal code.) The 1990 law forbade 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 Religion Law helped facilitate a revival of religious activity.

In October 1997, the Duma enacted and then-President Boris Yeltsin signed, a new, restrictive, and potentially discriminatory law on religion. The 1997 Religion Law ostensibly targeted so-called "totalitarian sects" or dangerous religious "cults." However, the intent of some of the law's sponsors appears to have been to discriminate against members of foreign and less well-established religions by making it difficult for them to manifest their beliefs through organized religious institutions.

The 1997 Law on Religion is very complex, with many ambiguous and contradictory provisions. It creates various categories of religious communities with differing levels of legal status and privileges. The law distinguishes between religious "groups" and "organizations," and creates two categories of organizations: "regional" and "centralized." A religious "group" is a congregation of worshipers that 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. A "group" does not enjoy tax benefits and other rights extended to religious organizations, such as the right of its members to proselytize. The law does not purport to abridge the rights of individual members of groups in other respects. For example, a member of a religious group can buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. Groups are permitted to rent public spaces and hold services. Nonetheless, in practice, groups that are not registered encounter formidable difficulty in achieving these rights.

The 1997 law provided that local congregations that had existed for 15 years were eligible for registration as local "organizations." A "centralized religious organization" can be founded by a confession that has 3 functioning local "organizations" (each of which must have at least 10 members who are citizens) in different regions. A centralized organization has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without adhering to the 15-year rule. In implementing this provision, the Government has extended this definition to include a "registered centralized managing center." Among the law's most controversial provisions are those that limit the rights, activities, and status of religious "groups" existing in the country for less than 15 years and require that religious groups exist for 15 years before they can qualify for "organization" status.

Implementation of the 1997 law has been a source of concern for many religious minorities, especially those based outside the country. Groups that did not manage to register under the old law or groups that are new to the country are severely hindered in their ability to practice their faith. However, for those that were registered before the passage of the 1997 law, the situation is somewhat better. The Constitutional Court's November 1999 ruling effectively "grandfathered in" a number of religious organizations that were registered at the time the 1997 law was passed but could not prove 15 years of operation in Russia.

In practice the registration process, which involves simultaneous registration at both the federal and local levels, has proven to be onerous for a number of confessions, because it requires considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded domestic religious organizations, in particular, began the reregistration process soon after publication of the regulations governing reregistration. However, other religious groups faced significant problems in registration and reregistration, and local officials refused to register some groups.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, the regions, and localities have established consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and to monitor application of the Law on Religion. Groups interact with a special governmental interministerial commission on religion, which includes representatives from law enforcement bodies, on matters involving implementation of the laws and similar questions. On broader policy questions, religious groups interact with a special department within the Presidential Administration's Directorate for Domestic Policy. Nevertheless, as a result of the lack of specific guidance on how to apply the 1997 law correctly and the shortage of knowledgeable local officials, registering before the December 31, 2000, deadline was a significant obstacle for a number of religious bodies, which are either subject to liquidation or have been liquidated.

According to Ministry of Justice figures published in May 2001, approximately 18,130 organizations were reregistered or registered anew, while 2,095 (10 percent of 20,215) organizations are subject to liquidation (elimination of legal status as a juridical person). This represents an increase of over 1200 organizations officially registered since the 1997 religion law went into effect. Ministry of Justice officials estimate that as of May 2001, nearly 100 organizations have been liquidated through court proceedings. The majority of such organizations may exist on paper only. However, some of them appear to have been liquidated after repeated attempts to register with the local branch of the Ministry of Justice failed.

Religious groups also can work through a Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Organizations, composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academics who are specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of religious denominations making up the majority of believers in the country. In March 2000, the Government announced that the Council had been reorganized, reduced in size, and its membership changed. All government officials who previously held positions on the Council, other than those representing the Presidential Administration, lost their seats. Religious denominations also lost several seats, and in some cases groups that had previously had several representatives were reduced to only one. This reorganization was criticized by some groups. For example, longtime Council member Rabbi Adolf Shayevich of the Moscow Choral Synagogue lost his seat to his rival Rabbi Berel Lazar of the Moscow Lubavitch community, who has tended not to criticize the Russian Government under Putin; this led to allegations of government favoritism and politically motivated interference in the affairs of the Jewish community. Other groups such as Pentecostals, which have several large umbrella organizations, were allowed only one representative as well. Some NGO's have alleged that the prominent role of members of the Presidential Administration in the Council's activities gives the Council a greater influence with the Ministry of Justice on registering some religious groups than those implied in its mandated advisory role.

Religious groups also can interact with the authorities through the offices of the new Plenipotentiary Presidential District Representatives (PolPreds) of the seven newly formed districts of the Russian Federation. In the administrative structures of at least some of the Polpreds, offices have been designated to deal with social and religious issues. There is also a department of religious affairs in each regional administration and in many municipal administrations. However, it is at the regional and municipal level that religious minorities often encounter the greatest problems.

The office of Russian Federation Human Rights Ombudsman Oleg Mironov set up a department dedicated to religious freedom issues. This department receives numerous complaints from individuals and groups about infringement of religious freedom. Mironov has criticized the 1997 Religion Law publicly on many occasions and recommended changes to bring it into accordance with international standards and with the Constitution. He also lobbied President Putin unsuccessfully to extend the deadline for reregistration. Nevertheless, some argue that these efforts come too late for organizations facing liquidation, since the deadline for reregistration expired December 31, 2000.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Among the Law on Religion's most controversial provisions are those that limit the rights, activities, and status of religious "groups" existing in the country for less than 15 years and require that religious groups exist for 15 years before they can qualify for "organization" status. These articles may violate the Constitution's provision of equality before the law of all religious confessions.

The cases of a Khakasiya Pentecostal church and the Yaroslavl Jehovah's Witnesses formed the basis of a constitutional challenge to the Law on Religion filed with the Constitutional Court in May 1998 by the Institute for Religion and Law, an NGO. The petitioners claimed that the provision of the law requiring religious organizations to prove 15 years of existence in the country in order to register is unconstitutional. In a November 1999 hearing, the Constitutional Court upheld the 15-year provision, but also ruled that religious organizations registered before the passage of the 1997 law need not meet the 15-year requirement in order to be registered.

However, this ruling does not enable independent churches with less than 15 years in the country to register as religious organizations unless they were registered before the passage of the law or affiliate themselves with existing centralized organizations. The Institute for Religion and Law and other NGO's note that this is a significant restriction for small independent religious communities and foreign-based "new religions," such as the Church of Scientology. Also, some domestic human rights activists are concerned by language in the ruling that cites 1993 and 1996 decisions in the European Court of Human Rights regarding religious sects, and upholds the right of the Government to place certain limits on the activity of religious groups in the interests of national security. The Security Council adopted a National Security Concept in the spring of 2000 that includes a specific warning on the allegedly negative impact of foreign missionary activity.

Despite the Federal Government's efforts to implement the 1997 Religion Law liberally and to provide assurances that religious freedom would be observed, restrictions continue at the local level. The vagueness of the law and regulations, the contradictions between federal and local law, and varying interpretations provide regional officials with a pretext for restricting the activities of religious minorities. Discriminatory practices at the local level are partly attributable to the decentralization of power that occurred during the Yeltsin era. They are also due to the relatively greater susceptibility of local governments to lobbying by majority religions and discriminatory attitudes that are held widely in society. However, under the Putin Administration, the Government has attempted to rectify this situation to some degree by introducing measures to strengthen the center in its relations with the regions. As part of this effort, President Putin divided the country into seven districts overseen by the Polpreds and introduced a federal register to ensure that local legislation conforms to the Federation's Constitution and federal laws.

Since 1994, 33 of the country's 89 regional governments have passed laws and decrees intended to restrict the activities of religious groups. In May 2001, the Ministry of Justice reported that these 33 regions passed 50 regional laws and other legislative bills relating to freedom of religion. The Ministry determined that 35 of these were unconstitutional or not in conformity with federal legislation. The Federal Government was not able to challenge effectively the unconstitutionality of these restrictions before the advent of the Putin administration, although under President Yeltsin it sent warnings to 30 regions regarding the unconstitutionality of local laws concerning religion. In 2000 and the first half of 2001, regional administrations have been required to register local laws, a procedure that ensures that they are in accordance with federal legislation. This process of centralization and coordination of authority was continuing as of the end of the period covered by this report. As of the end of May 2001, 6 of the 35 laws were rescinded, and 8 were brought into conformance with federal law. The Federal Government is able to work through the Procurator, Minister of Justice, Presidential Administration, and the courts to force regions to comply with federal law. The Government also has become 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. For example, the Presidential Academy of State Service has actively worked with religious freedom advocates such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice to train regional and municipal officials in properly implementing the law.

Implementation of the 1997 law has been a source of concern by many religious minorities, especially those based outside the country. Groups that did not manage to register under the old law or groups that are new to the country are severely hindered in their ability to practice their faith. However, for those that were registered before passage of the 1997 law, the situation is somewhat better. The Constitutional Court's November 1999 ruling effectively "grandfathered in" a number of religious organizations that were registered at the time the 1997 law was passed but could not prove 15 years of operation in Russia. For example, in

the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, the 15 year rule no longer prevented the registration of newly created local Jehovah's Witnesses religious organizations, nor reregistration of organizations which were registered at the time of implementation of the 1997 law, but which were less than 15 years old.

In practice the registration process, which involves simultaneous registration at both the federal and local levels, has proven onerous for a number of confessions; it requires considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded domestic religious organizations, in particular, began the reregistration process soon after publication of the regulations governing reregistration. Russian Pentecostal groups, which have a solid and growing network of churches throughout the country, sought guidance from the Ministry of Justice on reregistration as early as November 1997. However, a large number of Pentecostal parishes (by some estimates up to 500) remain unregistered. This is partially because some congregations refuse to register out of philosophical convictions. In many other cases, local officials, sometimes prejudiced by close relations with local Russian Orthodox officials, have refused to register Pentecostal and other non-Orthodox organizations.

According to NGO and media reports and government officials, registration of Muslim religious organizations proceeded slowly, leaving many local religious organizations unable to reregister before the December 31, 2000, deadline. The process was complicated by irregularities in registration in some Muslim regions like Bashkortostan and Dagestan, which required federal intervention. An intraconfessional conflict between rival Muslim groups exacerbated the situation. A struggle between the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in European Russia and Siberia, based in Ufa and led by Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin, and the Moscow-based Russian Council of Muftis, led by Chief Mufti Ravil Gainutdin, appears to have hindered reregistration efforts by Muslim organizations. According to the Ministry of Justice, only 2,610 Muslim organizations had reregistered by May 2001, a decrease of nearly 400 registered organizations compared to 1997. The mutual accusations of "Wahhabism" by the two groups have complicated matters, since this pejorative label (as used in Russia) may have had a detrimental affect on reregistration in certain regions and has made local ethnic Russians more wary of Muslim religious organizations. (The word "Wahhabi" refers to a Sunni branch of Islam that has become a pejorative term in Russia because of persistent allegations that "Wahhabi extremism" is to blame for terrorist attacks linked to the war in Chechnya.) Recognizing the scope of the problem, federal officials have directed that local branches of the Ministry of Justice refrain from liquidating Muslim organizations until the problem can be resolved. The implication is that those organizations that did not manage to reregister are expected to be able to do so even though the deadline passed several months ago. However, according to an April 11, 2000, report by Keston News Service, Kabardino-Balkariya authorities have liquidated 37 Muslim organizations that failed to submit documents for reregistration. Keston News Service also reported in April that the Kabardino-Balkaria regional parliament had passed a law banning extremist religious activities that was aimed primarily at "Wahhabism." A similar ban exists in Dagestan.

On November 24, 2000, Keston news service reported that the Federal Security Service (FSB) provided information to local newspapers in Kostroma to discredit the pastor of a local Pentecostal Church involved in litigation over its impending liquidation. Despite the fact that the articles appeared before the court process began, the Church won its court case.

The Church of Scientology has experienced many problems with both registration and harassment from the authorities.

It was registered as a religious organization only in Moscow in 1994. Despite repeated attempts to reregister this organization in Moscow, the Moscow office of the Ministry of Justice reconsidered reregistering the organization only after many refusals and a December 2000 court ruling. However, the Ministry, having consulted with the Procurator, decided to challenge the court's decision. As a result, the Church is still not reregistered and faces liquidation.

In its preamble (which government officials insist has no legal standing), the 1997 Religion Law recognizes the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." It accords "respect" to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and certain other religions as an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage. 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. This belief appears to have manifested itself in a church-state relationship that is detrimental to non-Orthodox denominations.

Under the 1997 Religion Law, representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities. They are barred from conducting liturgical services and other religious activity unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. Although the law officially requires all foreign religious organizations to register, in practice foreign religious representatives' offices (those not registered under law) have opened without registering or have been accredited to a registered religious organization. However, those offices cannot carry out religious activities and do not have the status of a religious "organization."

The Russian Orthodox Church has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. Although other denominations, such as Protestant

groups, have been granted access to military personnel, it is on a much more limited basis than that accorded to the Russian Orthodox Church. The Church has signed agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Interior, and the Tax Ministry over the last year. The details of these agreements are far from transparent, but from the information available the Church appears to be accorded preferential treatment over other denominations by these ministries.

Deputy Minister of Education Chepurnykh sent out a letter July 12, 2000, to all institutions of higher education warning of the threat from certain Western religious groups termed "extremist and destructive" and accusing the West of trying to undermine citizens by introducing "Western values" into education. Among the "cults" mentioned in the letter are Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, and the Mormons. The arguments in the letter echo statements made by Church officials including Patriarch Aleksiy II, who was reported on a December 20, 2000, television program as saying that the Russian Orthodox Church was concerned by the flood of various "cults" into Russia and by "pseudomissionaries." The Patriarch declared that, "certain forces want Satanists and other cults on our land, who employ psychotropic methods of hypnosis and steal the souls of our fellow countrymen." When the contents of the Ministry of Education letter became public, numerous minority denominations and NGO's protested. The Keston Institute on November 17, 2000 reported that its correspondent received mixed responses from Ministry of Education officials. One official reportedly said that the Deputy Minister's letter contained "incorrect formulations," while another official vigorously defended it and claimed that foreign "cults" were behind a wave of ritual killings in schools and that "something had to be done about it."

During a December 26, 2000, press conference, Lev Levinson, a Moscow Atheist Society representative and legislative aide to Duma deputy Sergey Kovalev, complained that the principle of secular education, guaranteed in the Constitution, has eroded. Levinson complained that in Belgorod school children take Bible study as a compulsory subject. Levinson said that even more troubling to him was that bureaucrats improperly transfer funds to the Orthodox Church. He cited as an example the cases of Moscow municipal authorities in Novo Kosinskaya and Ivanovskaya districts who reportedly contributed about \$1,379 (40,000 rubles) toward construction of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

Public statements by government officials and anecdotal evidence from religious minority groups suggest that the Russian Orthodox Church, in some cases may enjoy a status that approaches official. For example, religious minority groups based abroad have complained that customs officials at times have forwarded religious literature to the Russian Orthodox Church before approving its entry into the country. On October 6, 2000, NTV reported that then-Minister of Interior Rushaylo told a group that he was worried about the spread of various religious "cults" in Russia. He said that his ministry works closely with the Russian Orthodox Church in the interest of spiritual education and strengthening the moral fiber of Ministry of Interior personnel. Rushaylo admitted that relations with the Orthodox Church were much better than with Muslims, most likely because of the absence of a clear hierarchical structure in the organizations of the latter.

On October 17, 2000, NTV reported that the PolPred for the Urals region, Petr Latyshev, called for "strategic coordination" between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State on the basis of the Constitution and laws. Latyshev added that while all "traditional religious denominations" enjoy equal rights before the law, "we should admit that in our state Orthodoxy was and remains the foundation. We will resist any foreign spiritual expansion, taking every measure to help Orthodoxy without infringing on the rights of traditional religions." The Web site, "strana.ru," reported on December 18, 2000, that Latyshev had signed agreements, the first between a PolPred and the Church, with the Russian Orthodox hierarchy in Chelyabinsk, Yekaterinburg, Tobolsk, and Kurgan. In addition, the Southern regional PolPred, Viktor Kazantsev, has espoused publicly positions reflecting discrimination against certain non-Orthodox denominations. For example, the Stavropol newspaper Verst reported April 10, 2001 that Kazantsev asked the Russian Orthodox Church for help in fighting so-called "cults." In the article, Kazantsev complained that Mormons are taking over the Volgograd region, as are Krishnas in Cherkessya, Satanists and Pagan cults in Dagestan, Protestants in Kalmykiya, and Jehovah's Witnesses in Krasnodar and Stavropol. Kazantsev said, "We need to recognize without giving offense that the Russian State is primarily Orthodox, and we should behave accordingly." At the request of the Church, Kazantsev offered to help institute a course in public schools on Orthodoxy by the next school year.

NTV reported on October 29, 2000, that Minister of Tax Genadiy Bukayev and Patriarch Aleksiy II signed a cooperation agreement between the Tax Ministry and the Church. According to the agreement, "The parties will work together in preparing and conducting seminars and consultations on the most significant questions of taxation of religious organizations and in developing and executing a program in the socio-cultural sphere." On November 28, 2000, Tass news service reported that Rushaylo told a group of representatives from religious groups in Novosibirsk that there was a need to "neutralize sects preaching religious extremism." Rushaylo blamed so-called "Wahhabism" for initiating the conflict in Dagestan and Chechnya and called for "consolidating cooperation between law enforcement bodies and various religious confessions to tackle jointly prevention of religious extremism in Russia."

The Procurator General has been criticized by human rights activists and religious minority denominations for encouraging legal action against some minority religions and recommending, as authoritative, reference materials that are biased against Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and others. In correspondence with the public and government officials from other ministries, the Procurator has recommended literature that is extremely biased and is published by the Russian Orthodox Church. For example, in a letter to the

Chelyabinsk Human Rights Ombudsman that came to light during a recent trial, the procurator's office responded to a request for information about Jehovah's Witnesses by recommending a publication by the Missionary Section of the Russian Orthodox Church entitled "New Religious Organizations in Russia of a Destructive and Occult Nature." In addition, the Procurator has distributed a 1999 manual entitled "Activities of Religious Groups. Psychological and Juridical Aspects: Informational Resource Work for Procurator Personnel," to all regional branches of the procuracy. The manual contains biased descriptions of groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, the Unification Church, and Scientology. Also, the manual appears to provide instructions on how to generate criminal cases against these groups, including sample letters from distraught parents of members of these denominations. After Duma deputy Sergey Kovalev lodged a formal complaint to the Procurator General, a copy of an internal expert analysis was forwarded in response. In the opinion of the Procurator's expert panel, "the authors of the manual in no way instigate religious strife," but rather direct procurator personnel to implement the law on freedom of conscience precisely and correctly."

According to Ministry of Justice figures in May 2001, approximately 18,130 organizations were reregistered or registered anew, while 2,095 (10 percent of 20,215) organizations are subject to liquidation (elimination of legal status as a juridical person). This represents an increase of over 1200 organizations officially registered since the 1997 religion law went into effect. Ministry of Justice officials estimate that as of May 2001, nearly 100 organizations have been liquidated through court proceedings. The majority of such organizations may exist on paper only. However, some of them appear to have been liquidated after the failure of repeated attempts to register with the local branch of the Ministry of Justice. The "Victory of Faith" Pentecostal church in Amursk (Khabarovsk region), for example, was liquidated after repeated attempts to reregister. The local branch of the Ministry of Justice issued a January 25 order to initiate liquidation proceedings, indicating that local authorities ignored oral instructions from federal officials to refrain from initiating liquidation proceedings until February. Eleven affiliated churches that fell under the "Victory of Faith" local religious organization were affected by the liquidation. Church officials and religious freedom advocates claim that the head of the Khabarovsk administration Department of Religion engaged in a campaign against the region's Pentecostals, hindering the church's registration efforts and harassing visiting foreign missionaries with frivolous bureaucratic exercises, such as unnecessary document checks and challenges to valid visas, in an attempt to discourage missionaries from staying in the region. As of end of the period covered by this report, it was unclear whether federal officials would intervene.

Two other groups that experienced problems in reregistering were the Salvation Army and Jehovah's Witnesses. Both have attempted repeatedly to reregister their Moscow local religious organizations without success. In the case of the Salvation Army, it contested the Moscow local branch of the Ministry of Justice's refusal of registration twice in municipal courts, losing both cases. The experience severely hampered the organization's activities as Moscow officials temporarily refrained from cooperating on charity projects, and landlords hesitated to renew leases citing imminent liquidation. The Salvation Army finally succeeded in registering as a centralized religious organization at the federal level in December 2000, but efforts to reverse the denial of registration to the Moscow local organization faced further court challenges at the end of the period covered by this report.

Jehovah's Witnesses unsuccessfully have attempted to reregister the Moscow community of Jehovah's Witnesses, filing an appeal with a municipal court challenging the refusal. As of mid-2001, the case had not come to trial. The municipal judge has postponed the case five times.

In a separate case in Moscow, not originally based on the 1997 law, Jehovah's Witnesses are fighting an attempt by the Procurator to ban the local religious organization on the grounds that it is a danger to society. On February 23, 2001, the Golovinskiy municipal court in Moscow ruled against the Procurator, finding no basis to the accusations. However, the Procurator challenged this ruling successfully in a court of appeal, which sent the case back to the Golovinskiy court. Legal proceedings were continuing at the end of the period covered by this report.

Jehovah's Witnesses indicate that they have experienced problems in reregistering in other locations as well, including Tver, Chelyabinsk, and Kabardino-Balkaria. Legal proceedings in these areas were underway in mid-2001. In Kabardino-Balkaria three local religious organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses were refused reregistration repeatedly, and on April 24, 2001, a judge in Nalchik ordered the Ministry of Justice to reregister the groups. However, the Ministry refused to do so and challenged the decision. In addition, on May 14 a Jehovah's Witnesses local religious organization in the same region was liquidated in separate proceedings. In a number of regions, including Tatarstan, Tula, Lipetsk and Oryol, registration was successfully achieved through the courts. Jehovah's Witnesses have managed to reregister the vast majority of their previously existing religious organizations (199) and a religious center, despite a handful of difficult cases. Combined with newly registered organizations, they recorded a total of over 300 registered local organizations in 70 regions as of the end of the period covered by this report.

Some religious minority denominations accuse the FSB, Procurator, and other official agencies, of increasingly harassment of certain "nontraditional" denominations, in particular, Pentecostals, Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Unification Church. Churches have been targeted for ostensible criminal investigations, landlords have been pressured to renege on contracts, and in some cases the security services may have influenced the Ministry of Justice in registration applications.

The Church of Scientology has experienced many problems with both registration and with harassment from the authorities. Since 1999, in particular, the Moscow Scientology Church has come under intense pressure from the authorities. The Procurator formally charged the Church with criminal activities, including distributing medicine illegally. The case was brought to court, but on December 7, 2000, the court returned the case to law enforcement authorities for further investigation because of irregularities in the Procurator's case. In January 2001, the case was resumed but subsequently was dismissed for lack of evidence. The Procurator appealed; however, on May 19 the appellate court upheld the lower court's ruling clearing the Scientologists of all charges. The Church of Scientology reportedly is now considering a legal challenge to the Ministry of Justice's refusal to reregister it. The Church reports that the authorities have impeded the operation of its centers in Dmitrograd, Khabarovsk, Izhevsk, and other localities.

The Moscow Jewish Community, an organization involved in an intraconfessional dispute, came under intense scrutiny from the tax police, the Office of Visa Registration, and the Ministry of Interior for alleged criminal activities. In one instance, the attention came after an unresolved incident of violence within the community. The Community, which is presently registered as a local religious organization, has sought to change its status to that of a central religious organization, but this application has been rejected by the Ministry of Justice's Moscow Administration, the same office that has impeded registration efforts by the Salvation Army and Jehovah's Witnesses. However, most of the law enforcement activities directed against the community appeared to be related to a political dispute between former President of the Russian Jewish Congress, Vladimir Gusinskiy, and the Government.

The office of the Procurator General has harassed Krishna believers with a series of frivolous investigations, including examining literature in order to make an expert opinion of whether the beliefs are harmful to society. In at least one instance in late 2000, experts found no basis to the charge that Krishna beliefs represent a danger, but the case was sent back for further evaluation with the possibility of future legal action.

The Mormons have succeeded in registering 35 local religious organizations. However, in several regions local officials impeded registration. For example, since mid-1998 the Mormons have attempted unsuccessfully to register a local religious organization in Kazan, Tatarstan. The Mormons successfully challenged the refusal in court, and the local branch of the Ministry of Justice registered the group. However, the Tatarstan authorities revoked the organization's registration. The Mormons maintain that this action was illegal. The Mormons also have had difficulty in securing visas for some of their foreign missionaries coming to Russia; in particular, they have had difficulties with the Vladivostok branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Mormons also have had problems in procuring residency permits for missionaries in regions such as Chelyabinsk and Kazan. They assert that the authorities in some areas, including Chelyabinsk, have impeded foreign religious workers from registering, presumably to restrict foreign proselytizing. They also experienced trouble in obtaining permission to build and then occupy an assembly hall in Volgograd; the building was completed eventually, but municipal officials have delayed issuing permission to use the completed building. The local branch of the Ministry of Justice in Chelyabinsk continues to reject the local Mormons' registration application based on the alleged incompatibility of Mormon activities with federal law. The Chelyabinsk Directorate of Justice also has rejected the registration applications of Baptist, Adventist, and Pentecostal churches on similar grounds.

Roman Catholic religious workers also experienced problems in obtaining desired residency permits and visas. Catholic workers who are assigned full time to parishes in Irkutsk and Samara must go abroad once a year to renew their visas, unlike other foreign workers who can apply for multiple-entry visas or extend their stays. Unlike some other religious workers who obtained permanent residency or citizenship on the basis of marriage to Russian citizens, celibate Catholic clergy do not have this opportunity.

Authorities continued to refuse visas to a number of other missionaries, apparently as a result of earlier conflicts with the authorities. Individuals denied visas include Dan Pollard, formerly of the Vanino Baptist Church in Khabarovsk region, and David Binkley of the Church of Christ in Magadan, who were denied visas in spite of having been acquitted on tax and customs charges, and Charles Landreth of the Church of Christ in Volgograd who had been accused in the local press of being a spy. A fourth missionary, Monty Race of the Evangelical Free Church of America, who entered the country legally with a visa sponsored by a Moscow congregation, was refused registration to reside in Naberezhniy Chelny, Tatarstan. Race, who is married to a Russian citizen and has two children, has also been refused permission to register as a resident foreign spouse of a citizen. The letter of refusal he received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs's local passport control office cites "national security" concerns.

Disputes concerning the return of religious property confiscated during the Soviet era are cited by religious groups as a source of concern to a number of communities. According to the Presidential Administration, since the 1993 decree went into effect 4,000 buildings have been returned to religious groups. Approximately 3,500 of these were to the Russian Orthodox Church. About 15,000 religious articles, including icons, torahs, and other items, have been returned to religious groups. For the most part, properties of other faiths used for religious services, including synagogues, churches 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. On March 15, 2001, Prime Minister Kasyanov

ordered the Restitution Commission to cease its activities. Despite the cessation of the Commission's activities, a number of properties and objects have not been returned. For example, the Jewish community, which has met with some success on communal property restitution, is seeking the return of a number of synagogues around the country, of religious scrolls, and of cultural and religious artifacts such as the Schneerson book collection (a revered collection of the Chabad Lubavitch).

Reports continue that some local and municipal governments prevented religious groups from using venues, such as cinemas, suitable for large gatherings. In many areas of the country, government-owned facilities are the only available venues. As a result, in some cases congregations that do not have their own property effectively have been denied the opportunity to practice their faith in large gatherings. For example, Sergey Ryakhovskiy's Pentecostal church, "The Moscow Church of God of Christians of the Evangelical Faith," learned in March 2001 that a local theater that for years had provided space for the Church's meetings reneged on a longstanding agreement after what the Church claims were threats by authorities. According to an April 12, 2001, Keston News Service report, the theater director was summoned to the Culture Committee of the Moscow Regional Administration where he received a letter from the chairman of the committee asking him to cancel his agreement with the church. The theater director reportedly told Ryakhovskiy that the Moscow governor's administration was reacting to an FSB report on the church. Although the governor's office denied these allegations to the Keston correspondent, the theater director refused to confirm or deny the allegations, citing a fear that he might lose his job. Similarly, according to a December 1, 2000, report on NTV, municipal authorities in Penza prevented members of the Protestant church "Living Faith" from using a rented movie theater. The congregation was forced to move to a dilapidated building without heat, where temperatures during the winter reached 15 degrees below zero centigrade. The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, which does not recognize Patriarch Aleksiy's authority, has had numerous problems obtaining access to places for gathering. According to Keston News Service, as of April 2001, only a small percentage of the Church's 100 parishes meet in a building. Keston speculated that local officials appear reluctant to provide buildings to Orthodox churches not affiliated with the Moscow Patriarch.

According to a May 14, 2001 Keston report, the Vyborg region's chief architect refuses to allow a Protestant congregation to restore or use a building it bought in 1998. Authorities have refused to rezone the site for public (rather than industrial) use. Regional authorities who are attempting to remove a historic mosque have harassed Muslims in Vologda. Keston reported on May 11, 2001, that after the regional government lost its case in the Russian Supreme Court, the Muslim community was subjected to financial investigations, which the community claims are frivolous. Authorities in Sayanogorsk, in the Republic of Khakasiya, also have refused to allow the Pentecostal Church "Glory" to rent or use public space, despite the fact that the Church is registered and has approached the municipal administration repeatedly. Muslims in the Komi Republic and the Karelian regional capital of Petrozavodsk have not been able to build mosques because of what many believe is societal prejudice against Islam. On April 10, 2001, Keston News Service reported that Taganrog authorities ordered the Muslim community to demolish its mosque. Muslims claim that the order is based on anti-Muslim bias and refuse to carry it out. Hare Krishna leaders in Moscow have sought unsuccessfully for several years to acquire property to build a new temple and center. The Hare Krishna face eviction from the current center as a result of the construction of a new road. Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists in Moscow and other regions continue to have trouble leasing assembly space and obtaining the necessary permits to renovate buildings.

In Belgorod region, the regional parliament enacted a law restricting missionary activity, including the use of venues in which religious meetings could be held. Foreigners visiting the region are forbidden to engage in missionary activity or to preach unless the conduct of missionary activity had been stated in their visas (some groups reportedly sent religious workers on business or tourist visas in order not to alert the authorities to their activities). Protestant representatives in the region sent a letter of protest to the authorities asserting that the law was in conflict with the Russian constitution. No information was available as of the end of the period covered by this report concerning any attempts to enforce this law. Federal authorities have acknowledged that the Belgorod law is unconstitutional and at the end of the period covered by this report were working with the Oblast authorities to modify it.

Government authorities have been criticized for a long time for insufficient action to counter the prejudice and societal discrimination encountered by Jews and Muslims; however, over the last year the Presidential Administration has been much more vigorous in speaking out against prejudice and societal discrimination. President Putin and officials in his administration have made strong statements on the need for tolerance in a multiethnic Russia and have spoken out against anti-Semitism. Nonetheless, according to human rights activists and NGO's, anti-Semitism is still a significant part of the mindset of some Russian politicians and their constituents. Communist Duma Deputy Vasily Shandybin often has made derogatory references about Jews in public. For example, after the recent change in NTV management in April 2001, Shandybin complained that the Russian newsman Yevgeniy Kiselev had been replaced by the "American Zionist" Boris Jordan. In April 2001, when a Duma deputy proposed that deputies recognize the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, both Shandybin and his Russian Liberal Democratic Party colleague Vladimir Zhirinovskiy shouted down the proposal, complaining that no one was recognizing Russian victims. However, in May 2001, Duma deputy Aleksandr Fedulov proposed a resolution calling on President Putin to condemn anti-Semitism. The resolution was supported almost unanimously by the pro-government Yedinstvo faction, but did not garner enough votes to pass. The Communist faction voted unanimously against it.

In September 2000, a blatantly anti-Semitic article allegedly written by an official in the Presidential

Administration appeared in the newspaper, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not confirmed whether or not the official was indeed a member of its administration at the time of writing. Kursk Governor Mikhaylov made anti-Semitic remarks to the press in late November 2000. PolPred Poltavchenko reprimanded the governor in public and forced him to issue an apology.

During the 2000 gubernatorial elections, candidates' supporters in a number of regions resorted to anti-Semitism. Central Elections Commission Head Aleksandr Veshnyakov in December 2000 strongly criticized the use of anti-Semitism in election campaigns and urged candidates to refrain from inciting ethnic or religious intolerance. After a series of "skinhead" attacks in Moscow in May 2001, President Putin, Deputy Prime Minister Matviyenko, and Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov all condemned such "hate crimes" and emphasized the country's multiethnic character.

The Government has implemented partially an interagency program to combat extremism and promote religious and ethnic tolerance. Broad in scope, 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. Implementation of the plan, which is guided by an interagency commission on combating extremism headed by the Ministry of Education, was sporadic. Nevertheless, at least one NGO was able to work parallel to the program, 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 several northwestern cities such as Petrozavodsk, and has now turned its attention to Ryazan.

In November 1998, the Duma adopted a resolution condemning public statements damaging to interethnic relations in the country. A Government review of the implementation of existing laws against acts of national, racial, and religious hatred reported that 25 criminal investigations were conducted in 1998, and that 10 were opened by June 1999. The Ministry of Justice reported that 17 crimes were investigated under these statutes in 2000. Eight of these cases ended up in court. However, there is no information as to the number of convictions that resulted. Duma deputy Fedulov, during a public debate in May, claimed that only one conviction was obtained. The Moscow City Duma adopted the law forbidding the distribution and display of Nazi symbols in May 1999, and the Moscow regional Duma passed similar legislation in June 1999. As of April 2001, Moscow City Duma deputies were attempting to introduce amendments clarifying procedures for implementation of this law.

In June 2000, a schism in the Jewish Community led to the election by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Lubavitcher Rabbi Berel Lazar as Chief Rabbi of Russia over Rabbi Adolf Shayevich of the Moscow Choral Synagogue. Many in the Jewish community believe that the Government took sides in the dispute, showing overt support and preference for Lazar - for example, making him the sole representative of the Jewish community on the Administration's Religious Affairs Council - over the opposing faction, which was associated with media magnate Vladimir Gusinskiy, the then-President of the Russian Jewish Congress and a critic of the Russian Government. Under the leadership of the new president of the Russian Jewish Congress, Leonid Nevzlin, relations between that organization and the authorities appeared to have changed for the better. Critics point to President Putin's two special appearances during 2000 at events associated with Lazar, but other observers pointed out that Deputy Prime Minister Valentina Matviyenko, PolPred Grigoriy Poltavchenko, and other Presidential Administration officials attended and delivered remarks at the May 15, 2001 rededication of the Moscow Choral Synagogue (associated with Rabbi Shayevich).

In October 2000, Ministry of Interior and tax police entered the Moscow Choral Synagogue and conducted what community members believe to have been an illegal search of the premises. Members of the community accused the Government of employing law enforcement officials against a Gusinskiy-aligned community for political purposes. No charges resulted from the search. However, when it came time to renew the visa registration of the Moscow Chief Rabbi, who presides over the Choral Synagogue, authorities delayed issuing the renewal until the last minute, giving rise to more allegations of interference in religious affairs. The reorganization of the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations in February 2001 led to more allegations of interference after it became known that longtime member Rabbi Shayevich had lost his position and that Rabbi Lazar would serve as the sole representative for Russian Jewry.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There were no official reports of religious detainees or prisoners. However, during a November 17, 2000, legal motion by the Chelyabinsk procurator to liquidate a Unification Church social organization, official documents revealed that member Galina Derevskova had been hospitalized against her will by the authorities in a psychiatric ward for 9 days while they attempted to gather evidence against the group. They reportedly forced Derevskova to sign a document after her internment stating that she had submitted herself to the institution for evaluation voluntarily. She was released with no indication of mental health problems.

Keston News Service reported April 19, 2001, that a Court sentenced Aleksandr Volkov from Novocheboksariy to 6 months in prison on March 13, 2001, for refusing to perform military service. Volkov, a

Pentecostal Christian, refused to serve because of religious convictions.

Mormon missionaries throughout the country frequently were detained for brief periods or asked by local police to cease their activities, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing.

The Independent Psychiatric Association of Russia, along with several human rights organizations, have criticized the use of psychiatry in "deprogramming" victims of "totalitarian sects." In such cases, authorities use pseudo-psychological and spiritual techniques to "treat" persons who were members of new religious groups. There were no confirmed instances of this taking place during the period covered by this report.

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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The President and other government officials have been increasingly vocal about the need for societal tolerance in a multiethnic and multi-confessional society. While individual Russian politicians continue at times to make anti-Semitic statements, President Putin and his Presidential Administration have taken a very public stand against anti-Semitism and reached out to the Jewish community, including, in the last months of the reporting period, to both factions vying for leadership. President Putin has revamped the office in his Administration that deals with religious affairs and that office appears to be receptive to minority denominations' complaints and in some instances has assisted in resolving problems in the regions. The Presidential Administration co-sponsored a conference bringing together government officials from the regions, scholars, lawyers, NGOs and members of faith-based organizations.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

While religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens, relations between different religious organizations are frequently tense, particularly at the leadership level, and there continue to be instances of religiously motivated violence. Many Russians believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is at the heart of what it means to be Russian, and Russian Orthodoxy is considered in conservative nationalist circles as the de facto official religion of the country.

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. Traditionally, the Russian Orthodox Church has pursued interfaith dialog with other Christians on the international level. However, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church expressed grave reservations about the Pope's June 2001 visit to Ukraine, and the visit gave rise to a number of hostile statements by clerics and parliamentarians. The Patriarch has conditioned any future visit to Russia by the Pope on the settlement of outstanding issues between the two Churches.

Muslims, who constitute approximately 10 percent of the population, continue to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas where they are a minority. In October 2000, Muslim groups complained about a biased film on Russian Muslims entitled "Half Moon of the Caucasus" that aired on the state television channel, Russian State Television (RTR). The film portrays Muslims as affiliated with extremist forces in Chechnya and as disruptive to society. Muslims also have complained that citizens in certain regions have an irrational fear of Muslims, citing cases such as a recent dispute in Kolomna over the proposed construction of a mosque. Keston News Service reported on May 4, 2001, that Mufti Ravil Gainutdin complained that a Russian Orthodox Church priest in Kolomna called on the public to oppose construction of the mosque. Discriminatory attitudes have become stronger since the onset of the conflict in Chechnya in 1999. Authorities, journalists, and the public have been quick to label Muslims or Muslim organizations "Wahhabi," a term which has become equivalent with "extremists." For example, NTV reported on March 11, 2001, that Mordovian State University had instituted a careful selection process intended to exclude potential "Wahhabists." The university did not specify what criteria would be used in establishing who fit such a category. Such sentiment has led to a formal ban on "Wahhabism" in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkharia.

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. Muslim separatists targeted Russian Orthodox priests for killing in Chechnya. Several Muslim clerics in Chechnya have been killed during the period covered by this report as well, including Magomed Khasuyev, Imam Umar Idrisov, and Imams Mudayev, and Umalatov who were all killed in January 2001.

Jewish emigration rates are significantly lower than in the last years of the Soviet period. The number of Jews emigrating to Israel for economic reasons as well as fear of persecution increased approximately 70 percent in 1998, but has decreased since. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported on March 19, 2001, that the total number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (including Russia) to Israel decreased by 45 percent in the first 10 weeks of 2001, compared to the same period in 2000. According to Mikhail Chlenov, a Russian Jewish leader, the decrease in emigration is attributable to lower stress among the population.

Jews continue to encounter manifestations of societal discrimination. Anti-Semitic acts continue, and human rights groups have called for stronger governmental action to counter anti-Semitic acts. In September 2000, a group of extremists attacked a school in Ryazan where Jewish religious and cultural classes were being held, threatening faculty members and vandalizing the premises. By mid-2000 only one individual has been identified as responsible. After being detained briefly, the suspect was released and ostensibly disappeared. Authorities claim the suspect is on the "All Russia Wanted list." Following the incident, anti-Semitic news articles appeared in Ryazan newspapers blaming the Jews themselves for the incident. During the gubernatorial campaign in January, anti-Semitic graffiti appeared around the city. According to the Union of Councils for Soviet Jewry (UCSJ), which monitors anti-Semitism in the various regions of the country, a punk rock concert held in Tver in March 2001 featured a band "Pagan Reign" who screamed anti-Semitic slogans such as "Beat the Yids! Save Russia!" Several Jewish cemeteries have been vandalized, including the cemeteries in Nizhniy Novgorod and Samara. The Russian news website "lenta.ru" reported on March 19, 2001, that a Samara judge declared Mikhail Pankov, the head of a local group of "Satanists" who were responsible for the vandalism, to be insane and sent him to a psychiatric institution for forced treatment. On April 25, 2001, Glasnost News Service reported that the memorial to Jewish soldiers killed in World War II, that was due to be opened May 9, 2001, in Vladikavkaz, was completely destroyed by unknown vandals.

On May 29, 2001, UCSJ released a special report on anti-Semitism in academia, citing prominent professors and university administration officials in the Altay region, Vladimir, Pskov, and Saint Petersburg who have expressed, either in their publications or in a public forum, anti-Semitic views. The report details how these regional educators and administrators propagate conspiracy theories about Jews and promote negative Jewish stereotypes. Nonetheless, UCSJ acknowledges that such academics represent only a minority.

The ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity (RNE) paramilitary organization, formerly led by Aleksandr Barkashov, appears to have splintered and lost political influence in many regions since its peak in 1998. Although reliable figures on its membership are not available, the RNE claimed a membership of 50,000 in 24 federation chapters in 1999. The RNE continues to be active in some regions, such as Voronezh, and RNE graffiti has appeared in a number of cities, including Krasnodar. The cities of Tver and Nizhniy Novgorod registered "Russian Rebirth," a splinter group of the RNE, which in turn prompted protests from human rights groups including the UCSJ. However, in several regions such as Moscow and Karelia, authorities have successfully limited the activities of the RNE by not registering their local affiliates. Representatives of the Church of Scientology accuse RNE and other ultra-nationalist organizations of violence or threats of violence against their activities in a number of Russian cities, including Nizhny Novgorod, Barnaul, and Ekaterinburg.

Anti-Semitic themes continue to figure in some local publications around the country, unchallenged by local authorities. However, traditionally anti-Semitic publications with large distributions, such as the newspaper *Zavtra*, while still pursuing such anti-Semitic themes as the portrayal of Russian oligarchs as exclusively Jewish, appear to be more careful than in the past about using crude anti-Semitic language.

As so-called "nontraditional" religions in the country continue to grow, many citizens, influenced by negative reports in the mass media and public criticism by Russian Orthodox Church officials and other influential figures, such as anticult activist Aleksandr Dvorkin, continue to feel hostility toward "foreign sects." During the Jubilee Bishops' Conference of the Russian Orthodox Church, August 13-16, 2000, the Church issued a document entitled "Fundamental Principles of the Russian Orthodox Church's Relations with Other Faiths." In the document the Church identifies denominations such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons as proselytizing "cults" whose operations on the "canonical" territory of Russia must be stopped. According to the document, the mission of other "traditional" confessions is possible only under the condition that they refrain from proselytizing or tempting the faithful away from the Church with material goods.

Jewish groups, led by FEOR head Rabbi Berel Lazar, have taken a strong public stance against groups such as "Jews for Jesus," and have coordinated with the Russian Orthodox Church and other groups to fight the spread of so-called "cults" and "foreign missionaries." Activists in Rostov Velikiy picketed the proposed site for the construction of a Jehovah's Witnesses center on April 20, 2001, proclaiming their opposition to "totalitarian cults." Nizhniy Novgorod hosted a conference entitled "Totalitarian Cults: Threat of the XXI Century," which featured a number of presentations from both Russian and foreign "anticult" activists. The conference materials depicted such groups as Pentecostals, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church, and Scientology as "cults," despite the fact that all have legal status.

Members of some religions, including some Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unification Church, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, and the Mormons, continued to face discrimination in their ability to rent premises and conduct group activities (see Section II). In August 2000, a group of extremists attacked

members of Jehovah's Witnesses congregation and a Mormon assembly in Volgograd. As of mid-2001, no one had been charged with this crime despite the fact that the victims identified at least one of the suspects. According to Blagovest Info News Agency, on April 17, 2001, an Evangelical church in the Moscow Oblast city of Chekhov was burned to the ground. The incident occurred after a number of threats from "anticult" activists. In the same city, according to NTV, evangelical efforts to show a "Jesus" film in January 2001 were blocked by authorities who first instructed several institutes of culture to cancel an earlier agreement to show the film and, after protests, forbade all public events at the time because of an alleged flu epidemic (other holiday events apparently took place).

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government has continued to engage the Government, a number of religious denominations and groups, NGO's, 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 have been active throughout the period covered by this report in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom, including anti-Semitic incidents. U.S. Government officials engage a broad range of Russian officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis. These contacts include: government officials; representatives of over 20 religious confessions; the Institute for Religion and Law; 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 Ambassador publicly criticized in the strongest terms the attacks on the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses in Volgograd, as well as the attack on the Ryazan school where Jewish students were studying, calling on the Government for vigorous investigation of these crimes. The Ambassador traveled to Ryazan soon after the latter incident and presided over a roundtable of representatives from different ethnic and religious groups, including the Jewish community, and regional administration officials, to promote discussion of tolerance. The Embassy has worked with NGO's to encourage the development of programs designed to sensitize law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to discrimination, prejudice, and crimes committed on the basis of ethnic or religious intolerance. Embassy officials have met numerous Russian and American groups affiliated with the many religious denominations present in the country, participating in exchanges of opinion and conducting briefings on the status of religious freedom.

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 those cases and keeping Embassy staff informed on issues they have raised.

The Embassy played a role in resolving visa registration cases of several foreign religious workers of different denominations. The Embassy and consulates also have repeatedly investigated and raised with federal and local authorities problems experienced by individual missionaries, including the refusal of visas or registration. As implementation of the 1997 Religion Law continues, the Embassy maintains frequent contact with working-level officials at the Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In Washington as well as in Russia, the U.S. Government presses for adherence to international standards of religious freedom in the Russian Federation. Officials in the State Department meet regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about religious freedom in Russia as well as with visiting Russian representatives of religious organization. The 1997 Law on Religious Freedom has been the subject of numerous high-level communications between members of the executive branch of the U.S. Government and the Russian Government, involving the President, the Vice President, including the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State and other senior U.S. officials. On May 10, 2000, as part of a continuing exchange of information on the status of religious freedom in Russia, senior State Department officials, including Undersecretary for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky, together with Senator Gordon Smith and National Security Council Senior Director for Europe and Eurasia, Dan Fried, participated in a round table with representatives of religious communities to examine the state of religious freedom in Russia. An earlier roundtable had been held in September, 2000. An official of the Office of International Religious Freedom made a presentation in the June 2000 Moscow Conference co-sponsored by the Presidential Administration (see Section III), where she stressed the importance of respecting the rights of minority religions.

[End]

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