



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau)**International Religious Freedom Report 2004**

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Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibetan areas of China are appended at the end of this report.

The Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of activities of religious groups. The Government tries to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Despite these efforts at government control, membership in many faiths is growing rapidly.

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for many unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. The extent of religious freedom varied widely within the country. Unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference and harassment. Members of some unregistered religious groups, including Protestant and Catholic groups, were subjected to restrictions, including intimidation, harassment, and detention. In some localities, "underground" religious leaders reported ongoing pressure either to register with the State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA, formerly known as the central Religious Affairs Bureau) or its provincial and local offices, still known as Religious Affairs Bureaus (RAB). They also reported facing pressure to be affiliated with and supervised by official party organizations linked to the legally recognized churches. For example, some local officials in Henan Province often mistreated unregistered Protestants, and some local officials in Hebei Province tightly controlled Catholics loyal to the Vatican. In other localities, however, officials worked closely with registered and unregistered Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups to accomplish religious and social goals. During the period covered by this report, Government officials cautioned against "foreign infiltration under the guise of religion." The Government increased scrutiny of contacts between some citizens and foreigners involved in religion and detained some citizens for providing religious information to foreigners. Nonetheless, some local officials encouraged foreign religious groups to work in their communities to supply social services, provided that the groups did not proselytize openly. Many religious adherents reported that they were able to practice their faith in officially registered places of worship without interference from the authorities. Official sources, religious professionals, and persons who attend services at both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the number of believers in the country continued to grow.

Senior government officials claim that the country has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. In many areas of the country, children are able to participate in religious life with their parents but local officials in some areas forbid children from full religious participation. For example, local officials in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) have stated that persons younger than 18 are forbidden from entering mosques in Xinjiang. Local officials in Jilin City also have stated that it is illegal for minors of any faith to participate in religious activities; however, Jilin provincial officials disagree, stating that minors in the province are accorded full religious freedom. Senior government officials have consistently declined to clarify publicly the country's policy toward minors and religion.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as "cults" in general and of the Falun Gong in particular. The arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected

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to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse. Christian-based groups that the Government considered cults were subjected to increased government scrutiny during the period covered by this report.

The communities of the five official religions — Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism—coexist without significant friction; however, in some parts of the country relations between registered and unregistered Christian churches are tense.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. President Bush discussed religious freedom during his December 2003 meeting with Premier Wen Jiabao. Senior U.S. officials called on the Government to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and respect religious freedom. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made concerted efforts to encourage religious freedom. In Washington and in Beijing, in public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise religious freedom and to release of all those serving sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners. During the period covered by this report, some religious prisoners were released from prison, including Tibetan nun Phuntsog Nyidrol. Religious freedom also was a key agenda item in the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, until the Government suspended the dialogue in March. In the most recent round of the bilateral dialogue, in December 2002, the Chinese agreed to host separate visits by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not allowed either visit. In 2003, the Government twice postponed planned visits by USCIRF representatives at the last minute. Following those postponements, in January USCIRF members visited Hong Kong, a visit Chinese authorities publicly criticized.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 3.5 million square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2002 Government White Paper, there are more than 200 million religious adherents, representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. According to this official publication, the country has more than 100,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, more than 3,000 religious organizations, and 74 training centers for clergy.

The country has five officially recognized religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. The Russian Orthodox Church also operates in some regions and other religions exist in the country's expatriate community. Most of the country's population does not subscribe to any religious faith. Approximately 8 percent of the population is Buddhist, approximately 1.4 percent is Muslim, an estimated 0.4 percent belongs to the official Catholic Church, an estimated 0.4 to 0.8 percent belongs to the unofficial Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church, an estimated 0.8 to 1.2 percent is registered as Protestant, and at least 2.5 percent worships in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control.

Religious officials offer no official estimate of the number of Taoists, but academics place the number at several hundred thousand. According to the Taoist Association, there are more than 25,000 Taoist monks and nuns and more than 1,500 Taoist temples.

Traditional folk religions (worship of local gods, heroes and ancestors) have been revived, are practiced by hundreds of millions of citizens, and are tolerated to varying degrees as loose affiliates of Taoism, Buddhism, or ethnic minority cultural practices.

Buddhists make up the largest body of organized religious believers. The Government estimates that there are more than 100 million Buddhists, most of whom are from the dominant Han ethnic group. However, it is difficult to estimate accurately the number of Buddhists because they do not have congregational memberships and often do not participate in public ceremonies. The Government reports that there are 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries and more than 200,000 nuns and monks.

According to government figures, there are 20 million Muslims, more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (at least half of which are in Xinjiang), and more than 45,000 imams nationwide. The country has 10 predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Hui, estimated to number nearly 10 million. Hui are centered in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, but there are significant concentrations of Hui throughout the country, including in Gansu, Henan, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Hebei provinces and in Xinjiang. Hui slightly outnumber Uighur Muslims, who live primarily in Xinjiang. The country also has over 1 million Kazakh Muslims and thousands of Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baoan, and Tatar Muslims.

The unofficial, Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church claims a membership far larger than the 5 million persons registered with the official Catholic Church. Precise figures are impossible to determine, but Vatican officials have estimated that the country has as many as 10 million Catholics in both the official and unofficial churches. According to official figures, the government-approved Catholic Church has 69 bishops, 5,000 clergy, and over 5,600 churches and meetinghouses. There are thought to be some 37 bishops operating "underground," some of whom are likely in prison or under house arrest.

The Government maintains that the country has more than 15 million registered Protestants, 20,000 clergy, more than 16,000 churches, and approximately 25,000 registered Protestant meeting places. Protestant church officials have estimated that at least 20 million Chinese worship in official churches. Foreign and Chinese sources estimate that at least 30 million persons worship in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control. Some foreign academics estimate that the country's Protestants may number as many as 90 million. Domestic and foreign experts agree that the number of Protestants in the country is growing.

Estimates of the number of Falun Gong (or Wheel of the Law, also known as Falun Dafa) practitioners have varied widely; the Government claimed that prior to its harsh crackdown on the Falun Gong beginning in 1999, there may have been as many as 2.1 million adherents of Falun Gong in the country. Some estimate that the true number of Falun Gong adherents in the country before the crackdown was much higher. The number has declined as a result of the crackdown, but there are still hundreds of thousands of practitioners in the country, according to reliable estimates. Falun Gong blends aspects of Taoism, Buddhism, and the meditation techniques and physical exercises of qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi (a native of the country who lives in the United States). Despite the spiritual content of some of Li's teachings, Falun Gong does not consider itself a religion and has no clergy or places of worship.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to manage religious affairs by restricting religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship, and to control the growth and scope of activities of religious groups to prevent the rise of possible competing sources of authority outside of the control of the Government.

The Criminal Law states that government officials who deprive citizens of religious freedom may, in serious cases, be sentenced to up to 2 years in prison; however, there were no known cases of persons being punished under this statute.

The State reserves to itself the right to register and thus to allow particular religious groups and spiritual movements to operate. For each of the five officially recognized religions, there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities. The State Council's State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA) is responsible for monitoring and judging the legitimacy of religious activity. The SARA and the CCP United Front Work Department (UFD) provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of government regulations regarding religious activity, including the role of foreigners in religious activity. Employees of SARA and the UFD are rarely religious adherents and often are party members. Communist Party members are directed by party doctrine to be atheists.

Chinese law requires religious groups to register places of worship. Spiritual activities in

churches that have not registered may be considered illegal and participants can be punished. There are six requirements for the registration of "venues for religious activity": Possession of a physical site, citizens who are religious believers and who regularly take part in religious activity, an organized governing board, a minimum number of followers, a set of operating rules, and a legal source of income. Government officials claim that registration requirements are simple and places of worship are not required to affiliate with one of the five official "patriotic" religious organizations that correspond to the five recognized faiths.

Nearly all local RAB officials require Protestant churches to affiliate with the (Protestant) Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC). Credentialing procedures also can effectively require clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC, since the experts who vet clergy qualifications are drawn from the TSPM/CCC. Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refuse to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC. Some groups disagree with the TSPM/CCC teachings that all Protestant beliefs are compatible and that differences between Protestant denominations are irrelevant. In a few regions, Protestant groups have registered without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. These exceptions include the Local Assemblies Protestant churches in Zhejiang Province, where no significant TSPM/CCC community exists, and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province, both of which operate openly without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. Additionally, the (Russian) Orthodox Church in Heilongjiang Province has been able to operate without affiliating with a government organization, in part because the PRC has not created an Orthodox organization. In other regions, official Protestant churches informally aligned themselves with Protestant denominations. Some pastors in official churches said that denominational affiliation was an important way of drawing parishioners.

Some groups register voluntarily, some register under pressure, and the authorities refuse to register others. Some religious groups have declined to register out of principled opposition to state control of religion. Others do not register due to fear of adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders. Unregistered groups also frequently refuse to register for fear that doing so would require theological compromises, curtail doctrinal freedom, or allow government authorities to control sermon content. Some groups claimed that authorities refused them registration without explanation or detained group members who met with officials to attempt to register. The Government contended that these refusals mainly were the result of 'these groups' lack of adequate facilities.

The Government has banned all groups that it has determined to be "cults," including the Falun Gong and the Zhong Gong movements (Zhong Gong is a qigong exercise discipline with some mystical tenets.) After the revised Criminal Law came into effect in 1997, offenses related to membership in unapproved cults and religious groups were classified as crimes of disturbing the social order.

Government sensitivity to Muslim communities varied widely. In some predominantly Muslim areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially in Xinjiang among the Uighurs, officials continued to restrict or tightly control religious expression and teaching. Police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused by the Government of supporting separatism. The Government permits, and in some cases subsidizes, Muslim citizens who make the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca. In the first half of 2004, a record of over 10,000 Chinese Muslims made the hajj, half of them on government-organized delegations.

During the period covered by this report, local officials destroyed several unregistered places of worship around the country, although there were no reports of the widespread razing of churches. In Zhejiang Province, for example, there were reports that a few churches and hundreds of shrines were destroyed in the period from July to October 2003. Zhejiang authorities often claimed that destroyed buildings were not zoned for religious activities and thus unsafe. The Government has restored or rebuilt churches, temples, mosques, and monasteries damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and allowed the reopening of some seminaries, although the pace and scope of restoration activity has varied from locality to locality. In December 2003, for example, construction began in Beijing on the first new Protestant churches to be constructed in the capital since the People's Republic was founded in 1949. Although there is far greater interest in religion and a far greater number of religious adherents today, there are far fewer temples, churches, or mosques than existed 35 years ago, and many of those that exist are overcrowded and in poor condition.

In November 2003, the CCP Central Committee held a high-level meeting in Beijing attended by

Politburo members and other high-ranking officials responsible for overseeing religion. In January, a national work conference on religion organized by SARA was held to outline concrete actions to "strengthen religious work." The conference advised that officials should guard against Christian-influenced "cults" and avoid negative influences, including "foreign infiltration under cover of religion." Conference attendees also raised concern about circulation of foreign religious materials addressing the growth of Christianity in the country, including a documentary film entitled "The Cross" and a book entitled "Jesus in Beijing." Subsequently, many provinces convened their own local work conferences. For example, in February the Fujian Province conference noted that unauthorized establishment of religious venues and icons "interferes with the Government's administration of religious affairs, affects the normal activities of patriotic religious groups, helps the development of evil cults and illegal religious powers, and gives foreign countries opportunities to conduct religious penetration." The 2004 national work conference was a contrast to a landmark 2001 conference at which President Jiang Zemin spoke about the sustained role of religion in society and raised questions about the traditional Marxist concept of opposing religion.

In March, the 10th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) recommended revising the CPPCC Charter to permit the "freedom of religious belief."

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for religious freedom and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for members of some unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. The Government tends to perceive unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority, and it attempts to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of groups or sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP.

Some local authorities continued a selective crackdown on unregistered churches, temples, and mosques, and the Central Government failed to stop these activities. Police closed underground mosques, temples, and seminaries, as well as some Catholic churches and Protestant "house churches," many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. Several unregistered church leaders reported continuing pressure from local authorities. Despite these efforts at control, official sources, religious professionals, and members of both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the number of religious adherents in the country continued to grow. The Government also makes demands on the clergy or leadership of registered groups, for example, requiring that they publicly endorse government policies or denounce Falun Gong. The Government continued its harsh repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement and of "cults" in general. As in past years, local authorities moved against houses of worship outside their control that grew too large or espoused beliefs considered threatening to "state security." Overall, the basic policy of permitting religious activity to take place relatively unfettered in government-approved sites and under government control remained unchanged.

Official tolerance for Buddhism and Taoism has been greater than that for Christianity, and these religions often face fewer restrictions. However, as these non-Western religions have grown rapidly in recent years, there were signs of greater government concern and new restrictions, especially on groups that blend tenets from a number of religious beliefs.

In 1995, the State Council and the CCP's Central Committee issued a circular labeling a number of religious organizations "cults" and making them illegal. Among these were the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church, and the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy).

In 1999, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress adopted a decision, under Article 300 of the Criminal Law, to ban all groups the Government determined to be "cults," including the Falun Gong. The Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate also provided legal directives on applying the existing criminal law to the Falun Gong. The law, as applied following these actions, specifies prison terms of 3 to 7 years for "cult" members who "disrupt public order" or distribute publications. Under the law, "cult" leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to 7 years or more in prison.

During the period covered by this report, government repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement continued. At the National People's Congress session in March, Premier Wen Jiabao's Government Work Report emphasized that the Government would "expand and deepen its battle against cults," including Falun Gong. Thousands of individuals were still undergoing criminal, administrative, and extrajudicial punishment for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhered to the teachings of Falun Gong, or refusing to criticize the organization or its founder. There were credible reports of torture and deaths in custody of Falun Gong practitioners (see Abuses of Freedom of Religion Section).

The authorities also continued to oppose other groups considered "cults," such as the Xiang Gong, Guo Gong, and Zhong Gong qigong groups, some of which reportedly had followings comparable to that of the Falun Gong.

The Government has labeled folk religions as "feudal superstition," and followers sometimes were subject to harassment and repression.

The Government continued a national campaign to enforce 1994 State Council regulations and subsequent provincial regulations that require all places of religious activity to register with government religious affairs authorities. There was a great deal of variation in how local authorities handled unregistered religious groups. In certain regions, government supervision of religious activity was minimal, and registered and unregistered churches existed openly side by side and were treated similarly by the authorities. In such areas, many congregants worshipped in both types of churches. In other regions, local implementing regulations call for strict government oversight of religion, and authorities cracked down on unregistered churches and their members. Implementing regulations, provincial work reports, and other government and party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce vigorously government policy regarding unregistered churches.

In some areas, despite the rapidly growing religious population, it remained difficult to register new places of worship, even for officially recognized churches and mosques.

Due to a lack of transparent guidelines, local officials have great discretion in determining whether "house churches" violate regulations. The term "house church" is used to describe both unregistered churches and gatherings in homes or businesses of groups of Christians to conduct small, private worship services. Unregistered churches are illegal, but prayer meetings and Bible study groups held in homes are legal and generally are not subject to registration requirements so long as they remain small and unobtrusive. In some parts of the country, unregistered house churches with hundreds of members meet openly with the full knowledge of local authorities, who characterize the meetings as informal gatherings to pray, sing, and study the Bible. In other areas, house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends are strictly proscribed. House churches often encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups. As a result, urban house churches are generally limited to meetings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas may number in the hundreds.

Both official and unofficial Christian churches have problems training adequate numbers of clergy to meet the needs of their growing congregations. Due to restrictions and prohibitions on religion between 1955 and 1985, no priests or other clergy in the official churches were ordained during that period; most priests and pastors were trained either before 1955 or after 1985, resulting in a shortage of trained clerics between the ages of 40 and 70. Thus, as senior clerics retire, there are relatively few experienced clerics to replace them. The Government states that the official Catholic Church has trained more than 900 priests in the past 10 years. The Government permits registered religions to train clergy and allows limited numbers of Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics, and Buddhist clergy to go abroad for additional religious studies, but some religious students have had difficulty obtaining approval to study abroad. In most cases, foreign organizations provide funding for such training programs. Some Catholic clerics also have complained that they were forced to bribe local officials before being allowed to enter seminaries. Due to government prohibitions, unofficial or underground churches have particularly significant problems training clergy, and many clergy receive only limited and inadequate preparation.

Most religious institutions depend upon their own resources to cover operating costs. Contributions from church members are common among both Catholics and Protestants. Frequently, some religious institutions run side businesses selling religious items, while others run strictly commercial businesses, such as restaurants. Sometimes the Government funds repairs for temples or shrines that have cultural or historic significance. Official religious communities sometimes received funds from abroad.

The law does not prohibit religious believers from holding public office; however, party membership is required for almost all high-level positions in Government, state-owned businesses, and many official organizations. Communist Party officials restated during the period covered by this report that party membership and religious belief were incompatible. The CCP reportedly has issued two circulars since 1995 ordering party members not to hold religious beliefs and ordering the expulsion of party members who belong to religious organizations, whether open or clandestine. High-ranking Communist Party officials, including then-President and CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin, also have stated that party members cannot be religious adherents. Muslims allegedly have been fired from government posts for praying during working hours. The "Routine Service Regulations" of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) state explicitly that servicemen "may not take part in religious or superstitious activities." Party and PLA military personnel have been expelled for adhering to the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

However, according to government sources, up to 25 percent of Communist Party officials in certain localities engage in some kind of religious activity. Most officials who practice a religion are Buddhists or practice a form of folk religion. Some religious figures, while not members of the CCP, are included in national and local government organizations, usually to represent their constituency on cultural and educational matters. The National People's Congress (NPC) includes several religious leaders. Two of the NPC Standing Committee's vice chairmen are Fu Tieshan, a bishop and vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and Phagpalha Geleg Namgyal, a Tibetan "living Buddha." Religious groups also are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory forum that is led by the CCP and consults with social groups outside the Party.

In 1999, the Party's Central Committee issued a document directing the authorities to tighten control over the official Catholic Church and to eliminate the underground Catholic Church if it did not bend to government control. There has been continued pressure by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association on underground Catholic bishops to join the official Church, and the authorities have reorganized dioceses without consulting church leaders. The Government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and there is no Vatican representative on the Mainland. The Government's refusal to allow the official Catholic Church to recognize the authority of the Papacy in many fundamental matters of faith and morals has led many Catholics to reject joining the official Catholic Church on the grounds that this denies one of the foundational tenets of their faith. When government policy and Papal authority conflict—as they do, for example, on abortion or birth control—state policy takes precedence, leaving priests with the dilemma of how to advise their practitioners. Most bishops of the official Catholic Church are, in fact, clandestinely recognized by the Vatican. Nonetheless, tensions between the Vatican and the Government have caused leadership problems within the official Catholic Church in the country due to the friction between some bishops who have been consecrated with secret Vatican approval (or who obtained such secret approval after their consecration) and others consecrated without such approval.

Government relations with unofficial Catholic churches remained tense. Both Chinese and Vatican authorities stated that they would welcome an agreement to normalize relations. Nonetheless, disagreements concerning the role of the Pope in selecting bishops, the status of underground Catholic clerics, Vatican recognition of Taiwan, and the canonization of controversial Catholic missionaries on Chinese National Day 2000 remained obstacles, according to the Government. During the period covered by this report, the Government stated that statements by Hong Kong Diocese Bishop Joseph Zen about political developments in the Hong Kong SAR had become an obstacle to normalization of relations with the Vatican. Nonetheless, efforts at reconciliation continued, including a visit by Bishop Zen to Shanghai in April.

There are large Muslim populations in many areas, but government sensitivity to these communities varied widely. Generally speaking, the country's Hui Muslims, who often live in Han Chinese communities throughout the country, have greater religious freedom than Turkic

Muslims such as the Uighurs, who are concentrated in the western part of the country. In areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially among the Uighurs in Xinjiang, officials continued to restrict the building of mosques and the training of clergy and prohibited the teaching of Islam to children. In addition to the restrictions on practicing religion placed on party members and government officials throughout the country, in Xinjiang teachers, professors, and university students are not allowed to practice religion openly. However, in other areas, particularly in areas populated by the Hui ethnic group, there was substantial mosque construction and renovation, and also apparent freedom to worship. After a series of violent incidents, including bombings attributed to Uighur separatists, beginning in 1997, police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused of supporting separatism in Xinjiang. Because the Xinjiang government regularly fails to distinguish carefully among those involved in peaceful activities in support of independence, "illegal" religious activities, and violent terrorism, it is often difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those seeking to worship, those peacefully seeking political goals, or those engaged in violence. Xinjiang provincial-level Communist party and government officials repeatedly called for stronger management of religious affairs and for the separation of religion from administrative matters.

For example, in 2002 State Councilor Ismail Amat (an ethnic Uighur) told a delegation of National People's Congress delegates that, "while enjoying the rights of religious freedom, the citizens who have religious beliefs must place the basic interests of the State and the people before everything else," and that "we must not use the freedom of religious belief as an excuse to abandon or to dodge the management of religious affairs by the State."

Xinjiang officials told foreign observers that children under 18 are not permitted to attend religious services in mosques in Xinjiang. However, children were observed attending prayer services at mosques in Beijing and other parts of the country.

In a growing number of areas, the authorities have displayed increasing tolerance of religious practice by foreigners, provided their religious observance does not involve Chinese nationals. Weekly services of the foreign Jewish community in Beijing have been held uninterrupted since 1995, and High Holy Day observances have been allowed for more than 15 years. Both reform and Orthodox Jewish services were held weekly during the period covered by this report. The Shanghai Jewish community has received permission from authorities to hold services on several occasions in a historic Shanghai synagogue, which was restored as a museum in 1998. Local authorities continue to allow the use of the synagogue on a case-by-case basis for major holidays. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) meets regularly in a number of cities, but its membership is limited strictly to the expatriate community.

The authorities permit officially sanctioned religious organizations to maintain international contacts that do not involve "foreign control." What constitutes "control" is not defined. Regulations enacted in 1994, and expanded in 2000, codified many existing rules involving foreigners, including a ban on proselytizing. However, for the most part, the authorities allowed foreign nationals to preach to other foreigners, bring in religious materials for personal use, and preach to Chinese citizens at churches, mosques, and temples at the invitation of registered religious organizations. Foreigners legally are barred from conducting missionary activities; however, foreign Christians teaching on college campuses openly profess their faith with minimum interference from the authorities, provided their proselytizing remains discreet. Many Christian groups throughout the country have developed close ties with local officials, in some cases operating schools and homes for the care of the aged. In addition Buddhist-run private schools and orphanages in the central part of the country also offer training to teenagers and young adults.

Some foreign church organizations came under pressure to register with government authorities, and some foreign missionaries whose activities extended beyond the expatriate community were expelled or asked to leave the country. In addition foreign-produced materials about modern Christianity in the country, including the documentary film "The Cross" and the book "Jesus in Beijing," were banned by the Government. Some Christians who appeared in the film were interrogated or detained by authorities for brief periods.

The increase in the number of Christians in the country has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles. One printing company, a joint venture with an overseas Christian organization, has printed over 25 million Bibles since its founding in 1987, including

Bibles in Braille and minority languages, such as Korean, Jingbo, Lisu, Lahu, Miao and Yao. Bibles can be purchased at many bookstores and at most officially recognized churches. Many house church members buy their Bibles at such places without incident. A Bible costs from one to five dollars, making them affordable for most Chinese. The supply of Bibles is adequate in most parts of the country, but members of underground churches complain that the supply and distribution of Bibles in some places, especially rural locations, is inadequate. Individuals cannot order Bibles directly from publishing houses and house Christians report that purchase of large numbers of Bibles can bring unfavorable attention to the purchaser. Customs officials continued to monitor for the "smuggling" of Bibles and other religious materials into the country. There have been credible reports that the authorities sometimes confiscate Bibles in raids on house churches.

The Government teaches atheism in schools. However, university-level study of religion is expanding. Some universities mandated a course on religion for students in certain disciplines during the period covered by this report.

Senior government officials claim that the country has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. However, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Education noted after her September 2003 visit that Chinese students lack basic internationally recognized rights to religious education. Moreover, some local officials, especially in Xinjiang, prevented children from attending worship services, and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than 18 from entering. Senior government officials have not expressed a willingness to clarify this discrepancy. In some Muslim areas, minors attend religious schools in addition to state-run schools. In some areas, large numbers of young persons attend religious services at both registered and unregistered places of worship.

Official religious organizations administer local Bible schools, 54 Catholic and Protestant seminaries, 10 institutes to train imams and Islamic scholars, and over 30 institutes to train Buddhist monks. Students who attend these institutes must demonstrate "political reliability," and all graduates must pass an examination on their theological and political knowledge to qualify for the clergy.

The Government has stated that there are 10 colleges conducting Islamic higher education and 2 other Islamic schools in Xinjiang operating with government support. In addition provincial and local Islamic communities have established numerous Arabic schools and mosque schools. The former concentrate on Arabic language study, while the latter often serve as a stepping-stone to apprenticeship as an assistant to an imam or other Muslim religious worker. Some young Muslims study outside of the country in Muslim religious schools.

Religious schools and training institutions for religious leaders other than the officially recognized ones also exist but cannot register as legal institutions. The quality of education at unregistered institutions varies. Some such institutions are closed when they come to the attention of local authorities.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, unapproved religious and spiritual groups remained under scrutiny and in some cases were harassed by officials. In some areas, underground Protestant and Catholic groups, Muslim Uighurs, Tibetan Buddhists, and members of groups that the Government determined to be "cults," especially the Falun Gong spiritual movement, were subject to government pressure and sometimes suffered abuse.

Offenses related to membership in unapproved religious groups are classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. According to the Law Yearbook of China, arrests for disturbing the social order or cheating by the use of superstition totaled 12,826 in 2002, down significantly from previous years. Most experts agree that the spike in detentions on these charges in 1999-2000 resulted from the Government's crackdown, begun in mid-1999, on Protestant house churches, the unofficial Roman Catholic Church, and spiritual groups labeled as cults, such as the Falun Gong.

According to Falun Gong practitioners in the United States, since 1999 more than 100,000 practitioners have been detained for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhere to the teachings of Falun Gong, or refusing to criticize the organization or its founder.

The organization reports that its members have been subject to excessive force, abuse, detention, and torture, and that some of its members have died in custody. For example, in December 2003, Falun Gong practitioner Liu Chengjun died after reportedly being abused in custody in Jilin Province. Foreign observers estimate that half of the 250,000 officially recorded inmates in the country's reeducation-through-labor camps are Falun Gong adherents. Falun Gong places the number even higher. Hundreds of Falun Gong adherents were also incarcerated in legal education centers, a form of administrative detention, upon completion of their reeducation-through-labor sentences. According to the Falun Gong, hundreds of its practitioners have been confined to psychiatric institutions and forced to take medications or undergo electric shock treatment against their will. During April to June 2003, official Chinese media accused Falun Gong adherents of "undermining anti-SARS operations." Over 180 Falun Gong adherents were detained for allegedly inciting public panic and "spreading false rumors about SARS."

In April, dozens of members of the Three Grades of Servants Church, which the Government labels a "cult," were detained in Heilongjiang Province. Gu Xianggao, allegedly a church member, was beaten to death in a Heilongjiang Province security facility shortly after these detentions. Public security officials paid compensation to Gu's family for the death.

In some areas, security authorities used threats, demolition of unregistered property, extortion, interrogation, detention, and at times beatings and torture to harass leaders of unauthorized groups and their followers. Unregistered religious groups that preach beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine (such as imminent coming of the Apocalypse or holy war) or groups that have charismatic leaders often are singled out for particularly severe harassment. Some observers have attributed the unorthodox beliefs of some of these groups to poorly trained clergy and lack of access to religious texts. Others believe that some individuals may be exploiting the reemergence of interest in religion for personal gain.

Many religious leaders and adherents have been detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms. Local authorities also use an administrative process to punish members of unregistered religious groups. Citizens may be sentenced by a nonjudicial panel of police and local authorities to up to 3 years in reeducation-through-labor camps. Many religious detainees and prisoners were held in such facilities during the period covered by this report. For example, in September 2003, house church historian Zhang Yinan and legal advisor to the South China Church Xiao Biguang were detained in Henan Province. Xiao remains detained and Zhang was sentenced to 2 years of reeducation through labor. He reportedly was beaten in the camp. In October 2003, Beijing-based house Christian Liu Fenggang was detained in Xiaoshan, Zhejiang Province, while conducting an investigation into reports of church demolitions and detention of leaders in the Local Assembly ("Little Flock") Church. Two other house Christians, Xu Yonghai and Zhang Shengqi, also remained in detention at the end of the period covered by this report, allegedly for helping Liu provide information to foreign organizations. In March, the three were tried in Zhejiang Province on charges of disclosing state secrets. In January, house Christian activists Qiao Chunling, Xu Yongling, and Zeng Guangbo reportedly were detained because of their alleged effort to communicate about activities of house churches with foreigners. House Christian activists in several regions were prevented from leaving their homes during the meeting of the National People's Congress in March. In June, the government-run "Legal Daily" newspaper reported that Jiang Zongxiu had died in police custody in Zunyi, Guizhou Province, after being arrested for distributing Bibles. A "Legal Daily" editorial comment condemned local officials for mistreating Jiang. Also in June, dozens of leaders of the China Gospel Fellowship Protestant Church reportedly were detained in Wuhan, Hubei Province, but they were released after a short period. Gouxing "Philip" Xu reportedly was released from a reeducation-through-labor camp in June after being detained in December 2002 in Shanghai for unlicensed preaching.

Gong Shengliang and several other leaders of the unregistered South China Church reportedly continued to suffer abuse in prison during the period covered by this report. Sentenced to death in 2001 on criminal charges including rape, arson, and assault, Gong Shengliang, Xiu Fuming, and Hu Yong had their sentences reduced to life in prison on retrial in 2002. Li Ying and Bang Kun Gong had their sentences reduced from death to 15 years in prison. Four female church members who signed statements accusing Gong of sexual crimes were rearrested in 2002 and sentenced to 3 years' reeducation-through-labor, reportedly for recanting their accusations against Gong. There were reports that Gong has suffered physical abuse in prison, in part for refusing to abandon his religious beliefs. Additionally, elderly church member Chen Jingmao reportedly was abused in prison for attempting to convert inmates to Christianity. Government

officials and some registered and unregistered Protestants accused the South China Church of being a "cult."

In Hebei, where an estimated half of the country's Catholics reside, friction between unofficial Catholics and local authorities continued. Hebei authorities reportedly have forced underground priests and believers to choose between joining the official Church or facing punishment such as fines, job loss, periodic detentions, and having their children barred from school. Some Catholics have been forced into hiding. Numerous detentions of unofficial Catholic clergy were reported. In June, the Vatican formally protested the detention earlier in the year of three underground Catholic bishops from Hebei Province. Two were released shortly after their detention, although the whereabouts of 84-year-old Zhao Zhendong of Xuanhua City remained unclear. Underground Bishops Wei Jingyi of Helongjiang Province and Jia Zhiguo of Hebei Province reportedly were detained for a few days before being released in March and April respectively. Bishop Jia Zhiguo reportedly was again detained for several days in June, along with two other underground bishops. Underground Bishop Su Zhimin, who had not been seen since his reported detention in 1997, reportedly was hospitalized in November 2003 in Baoding, Hebei Province. Reports suggest that he had been held in a form of "house arrest." The Government continued to deny having taken "any coercive measures" against him and stated he was "traveling as a missionary." Reliable sources reported that Bishop Su's auxiliary bishop, An Shuxin, as well as Father Han Dingxian of Hebei and Father Li Hongye of Henan remain in detention. In July and October 2003 and also in May, underground priests and practitioners reportedly were detained in separate incidents in Hebei Province. The status of Father Lu Xiaozhou (Bosco), detained in June 2003 in Zhejiang Province, reportedly for administering sacraments to a dying Catholic, also had not been confirmed by the Government. According to several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), a number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during the period covered by this report.

Some underground Catholic and unregistered Protestant leaders reported that the Government organized campaigns to compel them to register, resulting in continued and, in some cases, increased pressure to register their congregations. Officials organizing registration campaigns collected the names, addresses, and sometimes the fingerprints of church leaders and worshippers. On some occasions, church officials were detained when they arrived for meetings called by authorities to discuss registration.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The communities of the five official religions—Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestantism—coexist without significant friction. However, in some parts of the country, there is a tense relationship between registered and unregistered Christian churches. There were reports of divisions within both the official Protestant church and the house church movement over issues of doctrine; in both the registered and unregistered Protestant churches there are conservative and more liberal groups. In other areas, the two groups coexist without problems. In some provinces, including Hebei, underground and official Catholic communities sometimes have a tense relationship. In the past, Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists have complained about the presence of Christian missionaries in their communities. Christian officials reported some friction in rural areas between adherents of folk religions and Christians who view some folk religion practices as idol worship. In general the majority of the population shows little interest in the affairs of the religious minority beyond visiting temples during festivals or churches on Christmas Eve or Easter. Religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetans and Uighurs, experience societal discrimination not only because of their religious beliefs but also because of their status as ethnic minorities with languages and cultures different from the typically wealthier Han Chinese. There also has been occasional tension between the Han and the Hui, a Muslim

ethnic group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country, using both focused external pressure on abuses and support for positive trends within the country. In exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, diplomatic personnel consistently urged both central and local authorities to respect citizens' rights to religious freedom and release all those serving prison sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested vigorously whenever there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and they requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. At the same time, U.S. officials argued to the country's leaders that freedom of religion can strengthen, not harm, the country. In December 2003, President Bush met with Premier Wen Jiabao in Washington and called for greater religious tolerance.

The U.S. Embassy and Consulates also collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within the country's religious communities, including bishops, priests, and ministers of the official Christian and Catholic churches, as well as Taoist, Muslim and Buddhist leaders. U.S. officials also met with leaders and members of the unofficial Christian churches. The Department of State's nongovernmental contacts included experts on religion in the country, human rights organizations, and religious groups in the United States.

The Department of State brought a number of Chinese religious leaders and scholars to the United States on international visitor programs to see firsthand the role that religion plays in U.S. society. The Embassy also brought experts on religion from the United States to the country to speak about the role of religion in American life and public policy.

During the period covered by this report, the Government suspended the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, which included religious freedom as a major agenda item. The most recent Dialogue session took place in December 2002, at which the Government stated its willingness to clarify its policy on religious education for minors. It also committed to invite the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to visit the country. However, the Government did not schedule these visits during the period covered by this report.

During the period covered by this report, the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor traveled to the country to discuss human rights and religious freedom issues with the Chinese Government. Two delegations of staff members of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and one from the Office for International Religious Freedom also traveled to the country to discuss religious freedom issues. In addition to meetings in Beijing, one of these delegations traveled to Xinjiang, and the other visited the TAR to discuss religious freedom. They met with Government officials responsible for religion, and with clergy or practitioners in official and unofficial religious groups. In June, an interfaith delegation from the NGO Appeal of Conscience Foundation visited Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai to discuss religious freedom and individual prisoners of conscience with Chinese officials.

U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing continued to protest individual incidents of abuse. On numerous occasions, the Department of State, the Embassy, and the four Consulates in the country protested government actions to curb freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, including the arrests of Falun Gong followers, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang and Catholic and Protestant clergy and believers. The Embassy routinely raised reported cases of detention and abuse of religious practitioners with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Administration of Religious Affairs until March, when the Government unilaterally implemented a policy of refusing to discuss such cases with Embassy officials in response to U.S. sponsorship of a resolution on Chinese human rights at the March UNHRC session.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

HONG KONG

The Basic Law (Hong Kong's constitution) provides for freedom of religion, and Hong Kong's Bill of Rights Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination. The Government generally respects these provisions in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to support the generally free practice of religion. Some overseas Falun Gong practitioners were denied entry into Hong Kong to attend an annual conference in May.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Six of the largest religious groups long have collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up a joint conference of religious leaders.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Consulate General officers meet regularly with religious leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) occupies 422 square miles on more than 200 islands and the mainland, and its population is approximately 6.8 million. Approximately 43 percent of the population participates in some form of religious practice. The two largest religions are Buddhism and Taoism. Approximately 4 percent of the population is Protestant, 3 percent is Roman Catholic, and 1 percent is Muslim. There also are small numbers of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews. Representatives of the spiritual movement Falun Gong state that their practitioners number approximately 500, although HKSAR government officials report the number is lower.

Hong Kong's 300,000 Protestants have 1,300 congregations representing 50 denominations. The largest Protestant denomination is the Baptist Church, followed by the Lutheran Church. Other major denominations include Seventh-day Adventists, Anglicans, Christian and Missionary Alliance groups, the Church of Christ in China, Methodists, and Pentecostals. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) also is present.

There are approximately 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, approximately 800 Christian churches and chapels, 4 mosques, 1 Hindu temple, 1 Sikh temple, and 1 synagogue. The 240,000 Catholics are served by approximately 300 priests, 60 monks, and 500 nuns, all of whom maintain traditional links to the Vatican. More than 286,000 children are enrolled in 320 Catholic schools and kindergartens. The Assistant Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference has his office in Hong Kong. Protestant churches run 3 colleges and more than 700 schools. Religious leaders tend to focus primarily on local spiritual, educational, social, and medical needs. Some religious leaders and communities maintain active contacts with their mainland and international counterparts. Catholic and Protestant clergy are invited to give seminars on the mainland, teach classes there, and develop two-way student exchanges on an ongoing basis. Numerous foreign missionary groups operate in and out of HKSAR.

A wide range of faiths is represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service. A large number of influential non-Christians receive education in Christian schools.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitution, provides for freedom of religion, and the Bill of Rights Ordinance prohibits religious discrimination by the HKSAR Government. The Government generally respects these provisions in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect religious freedom and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. Although a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since July 1, 1997, HKSAR maintains autonomy in the area of religious freedom under the "one country, two systems" concept that defines its relationship with the mainland. The Government does not recognize a state religion,

and a wide range of faiths is represented in the Government, the judiciary, and the civil service.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government and are exempted specifically from the Societies Ordinance, which requires the registration of nongovernmental organizations. Catholics in HKSAR recognize the Pope as the head of the Catholic Church.

Religious groups wishing to purchase a site to construct a school or hospital initiate their request with the Lands Department. Church-affiliated schools make their request to the Education and Manpower Bureau. Church-affiliated hospitals do so with the Health and Welfare Bureau. For other matters, the Home Affairs Bureau functions as a liaison between religious groups and the Government.

Representatives of 6 of the largest religious groups (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Roman Catholic, Muslim, and Anglican) comprise 40 members of the 800-member Election Committee, which chooses HKSAR's Chief Executive.

The Government grants public holidays to mark special religious days on the traditional Chinese and Christian calendars, including Christmas and Buddha's birthday.

Religious groups have a long history of cooperating with the Government on social welfare projects. For example, the Government often funds the operating costs of schools and hospitals built by religious groups.

The spiritual movement known as Falun Gong, which does not consider itself a religion, is registered under the Societies Ordinance, practices freely, and is able to stage public demonstrations. The legal appeal of 16 Falun Gong practitioners convicted of obstruction of public space and minor assault during demonstrations in March 2002 outside the PRC Government Liaison Office was pending at the end of the period covered by this report. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Xiang Gong and Yan Xin Qigong, also are registered and practiced freely in HKSAR.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not have jurisdiction over religious practices in HKSAR.

The Basic Law calls for ties between Hong Kong religious organizations and their mainland counterparts to be based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect." This provision has not affected religious freedom in HKSAR. In September 2002, Bishop Joseph Zen was appointed head of Hong Kong's Catholic Diocese. In April Bishop Zen, who has been an outspoken critic of both mainland and HKSAR policies, was allowed to travel to the mainland for the first time since 1998.

The spiritual group Falun Gong is free to practice, organize, conduct public demonstrations, and attract public attention for its movement. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in the HKSAR is reported to have dropped from approximately 1,000 to approximately 500 since the crackdown on the mainland began in mid-1999, although government officials claim that the number is lower for both periods. During the period covered by this report, Falun Gong regularly conducted public protests against the repression of fellow practitioners in the PRC, holding daily protests in the vicinity of the Hong Kong offices of the PRC Government. At least two bookstores carried Falun Gong books. Three local newspapers printed ads purchased by the group protesting the PRC Government's actions against its members. In May more than 700 Falun Gong adherents, including 350 from overseas, held an annual conference at a privately owned facility in Hong Kong. Twenty-three practitioners from Taiwan and 6 from Macau were denied entry, while 250 Taiwan practitioners and 4 Macau practitioners were allowed entry to attend the conference. The Government stated "security" was the reason for barring the entry of the 29 practitioners.

In February 2003, the Government barred 80 Taiwanese Falun Gong practitioners from entering Hong Kong to attend an annual conference, although another 380 Taiwanese practitioners in the same group were admitted. On behalf of four of the overseas practitioners who were denied entry, the local Falun Gong association submitted an application for judicial review against the

Immigration Department's decision to refuse entry. In October 2003, the court rejected the application on grounds that the group's chairman did not have sufficient interest to support it.

In 2002, an Australian artist and Falun Gong practitioner exhibited art at a public venue. The artist's exhibit catalog contained material critical of the mainland Government's treatment of Falun Gong practitioners. The Government requested that the exhibit organizer not distribute the catalog but took no action when the organizer disregarded the request.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

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

Two ecumenical bodies facilitate cooperative work among the Protestant churches and encourage local Christians to play an active part in society. Six of the largest religious groups (Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Muslim) long have collaborated in a collegium on community affairs and make up the joint conference of religious leaders.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the HKSAR Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Consulate General officers have made clear U.S. government interests in the full protection and maintenance of freedom of religion, conscience, expression, and association. Consulate General officers at all levels meet regularly with religious leaders and community representatives.

MACAU

The Basic Law, which is the constitution of Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR), and the Religious Freedom Ordinance provide for freedom of religion and prohibit discrimination on the basis of religious practice, and the Macau SAR Government generally respects these rights in practice.

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

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

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

Section I. Religious Demography

Macau SAR has a total area of 13 square miles, and its population is approximately 450,000. According to 1996 census figures, of the more than 355,000 persons surveyed, 60.9 percent had no religious affiliation, 16.8 percent were Buddhist, 13.9 percent were "other" (followers of a combination of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian beliefs), 6.7 percent were Roman Catholic, and

1.7 percent were Protestant. The number of active Falun Gong practitioners declined from approximately 100 persons to approximately 20 after the movement was banned in mainland China in 1999. There are approximately 100 Muslims in Macau SAR.

Missionaries are active in Macau SAR and represent a wide range of faiths; the majority are Catholic.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law, Macau SAR's constitution, provides for freedom of conscience, freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach, and freedom to conduct and participate in religious activities. The Freedom of Religion Ordinance, which remained in effect after the 1999 handover of sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (PRC), provides for freedom of religion, privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. The Government generally respects these rights in practice.

There is no state religion.

The Religious Freedom Ordinance requires religious organizations to register with the Identification Services Office. There have been no reports of discrimination in the registration process.

Missionaries are free to conduct missionary activities. More than 37,000 children are enrolled in Catholic schools, and a large number of influential non-Christians have received education in Christian schools. Religious entities can apply to use electronic media to preach.

The Freedom of Religion Ordinance stipulates that religious groups may maintain and develop relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church in Macau SAR recognizes the Pope as the head of the Church. A new Coadjutor Bishop for the Macau diocese was appointed by the Holy See in June 2003.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not govern religious practices in Macau SAR. The Basic Law states, "The Government of Macau Special Administrative Region, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or in the efforts of religious organizations and believers in Macau to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau, or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the Region."

Falun Gong practitioners continued their daily exercises in public parks, where the police observed them once or twice a month and checked identification, according to Falun Gong practitioners.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Relations among the various religious communities are generally amicable. Citizens generally are very tolerant of other religious views and practices. Public ceremonies and dedications often include prayers by both Christian and Buddhist groups.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Officers from the U.S. Consulate General in Hong Kong meet regularly with religious leaders.

TIBET

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous counties and prefectures in other provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China. The Department of State follows these designations in its reporting. The preservation and development of the Tibetan people's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage and the protection of their fundamental human rights continue to be of concern.

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief, and the Government's May White Paper on "Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet" states, "Tibetans fully enjoy the freedom of religious belief." However, the Government maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas of China. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppress activities they view as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, such as religious activities venerating the Dalai Lama, (which the Chinese Government describes as "splittist").

Overall, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report; however, the atmosphere for religious freedom varied from region to region. Conditions were generally more relaxed in Tibetan autonomous areas outside the TAR, with the exception of parts of Sichuan's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Envoys of the Dalai Lama made visits to China for discussions with Chinese officials in 2002 and 2003, and they were negotiating a third set of visits at the end of the period covered by this report. Authorities released long-serving Tibetan monks and nuns from TAR Prison (also known as Drapchi Prison) in September 2003, February, and April. However, in October 2003, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported the death of a young monk serving a sentence in Sichuan Province, allegedly due to maltreatment received in prison. Numerous Buddhist leaders, such as Gendun Choekyi Nyima, Tenzin Deleg, and Sonam Phuntsog, remain in detention or prison, and key figures such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama remain in exile. The Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, rendering it difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. The "patriotic education" campaign begun in the mid-1990s officially concluded in 2000, but coercive activities to ensure the political reliability of monks and nuns continued. Core requirements of "patriotic education," such as the renunciation of the Dalai Lama and the acceptance of Tibet as a part of China, continued to engender resentment on the part of Tibetan Buddhists. Dozens of monks and nuns continued to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic education."

While there is some friction between Tibetan Buddhists and the growing Muslim Hui population in cities of the Tibetan areas, it is attributable more to economic competition and cultural differences than to religious differences. The Christian population in the TAR is extremely small. There are some reports that converts to Christianity have encountered societal pressure.

The U.S. Government continued to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas by urging the central Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom and preserve religious traditions. The U.S. Government protested credible reports of religious persecution and discrimination, discussed specific cases with the authorities, and requested further information about specific incidents.

Section I. Religious Demography

The Tibetan areas of China have a total land area of 871,649 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas is 5,354,540. Most Tibetans practice

Tibetan Buddhism and the traditional Tibetan Bon religion to some degree. This includes many Tibetans who are government officials. Other residents of Tibetan areas include Han Chinese, who practice Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and traditional folk religions; Hui Muslims; Tibetan Muslims; and Christians. There are 4 mosques in the TAR with approximately 3,000 Muslim adherents, as well as a Catholic church with 700 parishioners, which is located in the traditionally Catholic community of Yanjing in the eastern TAR. While officials state that there is no Falun Gong activity in the TAR, reports indicate small numbers of practitioners among the Han Chinese population.

The Government's May White Paper states that the TAR has over 46,000 Buddhist monks and nuns and more than 1,700 venues for Tibetan Buddhist activities. Officials have cited almost identical figures since 1996, although the numbers of monks and nuns dropped at many sites as a result of the "patriotic education" campaign and the expulsion from monasteries and nunneries of many monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama or who were found to be "politically unqualified." These numbers represent only the TAR, where the number of monks and nuns is very strictly controlled; approximately 60,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns live in Tibetan areas outside the TAR, according to informed estimates.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe, and the Government's May White Paper on "Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet" affirms, "Tibetans fully enjoy the freedom of religious belief." However, the Government seeks to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of the activity of religious groups. The Government remains suspicious of Tibetan Buddhism in general and its links to the Dalai Lama, and it maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppress those activities viewed as vehicles for political dissent, such as religious activities that are perceived as advocating Tibetan independence. Officials confirm that monks and nuns continue to undergo political training known as "patriotic education" on a regular basis at their religious sites. Political training has become a routine, and officially mandatory, feature of monastic life. However, the form, content, and frequency of such training appear to vary widely from monastery to monastery.

In 2002 and 2003, the Government extended invitations to emissaries of the Dalai Lama to visit Tibetan and other areas of China. In September 2002, Lodi Gyari and Kelsang Gyaltzen, the Dalai Lama's representatives to the United States and Europe respectively, traveled to Beijing, Lhasa, and other cities and met with a number of government officials. These were the first formal contacts between the Dalai Lama's representatives and the Government since 1993. They made a second trip to China in June 2003 to meet with Chinese officials and visited Shanghai, Beijing, and Tibetan areas in Yunnan Province. Additionally, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, visited in July 2002, making his first trip to the TAR since leaving in 1959. The Government asserted that the door to dialogue and negotiation was open, provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirms that Tibet and Taiwan are inseparable parts of China. Representatives of the Tibetan government-in-exile have announced that they were negotiating with the Chinese Government for the Dalai Lama's representatives to visit China later in 2004.

In its May White Paper, the Government claimed that it has contributed approximately \$40 million (300 million RMB) to renovate and open over 1,400 monasteries and to repair cultural relics, many of which were destroyed before and during the Cultural Revolution. According to the document, the Government allocated \$6.7 million (RMB 55 million) and large quantities of gold and silver for the first phase of renovation of Lhasa's Potala Palace from 1989 to 1994. Since 2001 it claims to have allocated \$40 million (RMB 330 million) for the second phase of the renovation of the Potala Palace, as well as the Norbulingka Palace (another former residence of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa) and Sakya Monastery (the seat of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism in rural southern TAR). Despite these and other efforts, many monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution were never rebuilt or repaired, and others remain only partially repaired. Government funding of restoration efforts was ostensibly done to support the practice of religion, but also was done in part to promote the development of tourism in Tibetan areas. Most recent restoration efforts were funded privately, although a few religious sites also were receiving government support for reconstruction projects at the end of the period covered by this

report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government officials closely associate Buddhist monasteries with pro-independence activism in Tibetan areas of China. In many places, particularly in the TAR, the Government continued to discourage the proliferation of monasteries, which it contended were a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. The Government states that there are no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, and that each monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC) decides independently how many monks the monastery can support. However, many of these committees are government-controlled, and in practice the Government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in many major monasteries, particularly in the TAR. The Government had the right to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders; however, the Government did not necessarily exercise this right in practice during the period covered by this report. Authorities have curtailed the traditional practice of sending young boys to monasteries for religious training by means of regulations that forbid monasteries from accepting individuals under the age of 18. Nevertheless, some monasteries continued to admit younger boys, often delaying their formal registration until the age of 18.

The Government continued to oversee the daily operations of major monasteries. The Government, which did not contribute to the monasteries' operating funds, retained management control of monasteries through the DMCs and local religious affairs bureaus. Regulations restricted leadership of many DMCs to "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns and specified that the Government must approve all members of the committees. At some monasteries, government officials also sat on the committees.

In recent years, DMCs at several large monasteries began to use funds generated by the sales of entrance tickets or donated by pilgrims for purposes other than the support of monks engaged in full-time religious study. As a result, some "scholar monks" who formerly had been fully supported had to engage in income-generating activities. Some experts are concerned that, as a result, fewer monks will be qualified to serve as teachers in the future. The erosion of the quality of religious teaching in the TAR and other Tibetan areas continued to be a focus of concern. The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in the TAR and other Tibetan areas was inadequate; many teachers were in exile, older teachers were not being replaced, and those remaining in Tibetan areas outside the TAR had difficulty securing permission to teach in the TAR.

Government officials have stated that the "patriotic education" campaign, which began in 1996 and often consisted of intensive, weeks-long sessions conducted by outside work teams, ended in 2000. However, officials state openly that monks and nuns continue to undergo political education, likewise known as "patriotic education," on a regular basis (i.e. classes held four times per year) at their religious sites. Some religious leaders also hold local political positions. Since primary responsibility for conducting political education has shifted from government officials to monastery leaders, the form, content, and frequency of training at each monastery appears to have varied widely. However conducting such training remains a requirement and has become a routine part of monastic management.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 2,248 Tibetans presented themselves at the UNHCR office in Nepal during 2003, of whom 1,815 were found to be "of concern" and provided with basic assistance; the remaining 433 departed for India without being registered or processed by the UNHCR. In September 2003, TAR Public Security Bureau officials told a visiting foreign delegation that 1,000 residents of the TAR receive passports each year, and that residents make 2,000-3,000 trips abroad each year. However, some Tibetans, particularly those from rural areas, continued to report difficulties in obtaining passports. Due in part to such difficulties and in part to the difficulty many Chinese citizens of Tibetan ethnicity encountered obtaining entry visas for India, it was difficult for Tibetans to travel to India for religious purposes. During the period covered by this report, a group of 18 Tibetans forcibly repatriated to China from Nepal in May 2003 under pressure from Chinese officials reportedly suffered torture, including electric shocks, exposure to cold, and severe beatings, and were forced to perform heavy physical labor. Their family members were pressured for bribes to secure their release. Nevertheless, many Tibetans, including monks and nuns, visited India via third countries and returned to China after temporary stays. Some returned exiles reported that authorities pressured them not to discuss sensitive political issues.

Following the 1999 flight to India of the Karmapa Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kagyu school and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, authorities restricted access to Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Lama, and intensified "patriotic education" activities there. The Karmapa Lama stated that he decided to flee because of the Government's controls on his movements and its refusal either to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or to allow his teachers to come to him. Visitors to Tsurphu during the period covered by this report noted that the population of monks remains small and the atmosphere remains subdued.

After the Karmapa Lama's departure, the authorities expanded their efforts to control the process of identifying and educating reincarnated lamas. The Government approved the seventh reincarnation of Reting Rinpoche in 2000, but many of the monks at Reting Monastery reportedly did not accept the child as Reting Rinpoche because the Dalai Lama did not recognize his selection. Another young reincarnate lama, Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa Lama in 1994, lived under strict government supervision at Nenang Monastery. Foreign delegations have been refused permission to visit Nenang Monastery.

Government officials maintained that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama is not illegal. However, authorities appeared to view possession of such photos as sufficient evidence of separatist sentiment when detaining individuals on political charges. Pictures of the Dalai Lama were not openly displayed in major monasteries and could not be purchased openly in the TAR. Diplomatic observers saw pictures of a number of Tibetan religious figures, including the Dalai Lama, openly displayed in Tibetan areas outside the TAR. However, in the months following an August 2003 incident in which unknown individuals hung the banned Tibetan national flag from a radio tower, private displays of Dalai Lama pictures were confiscated in urban areas of two Sichuan counties. The Government also continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama. Photos of the "official" Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, are not publicly displayed in most places, most likely because very few Tibetans recognize him as the Panchen Lama.

Approximately 615 Tibetan Buddhist religious figures hold positions in local People's Congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. However, the Government continued to insist that Communist Party members and senior employees adhere to the Party's code of atheism, and routine political training for cadres continued to promote atheism. Government officials confirmed that some Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officers are members of the Communist Party and that religious belief is incompatible with Party membership. However, some lower level RAB officials practice Buddhism.

Authorities prohibit Tibetans from actively celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6. Celebrations of other major religious festivals such as Monlam Chenmo and the Drepung Shodon have been marked by a somewhat more open atmosphere and diminished security presence than in the past, but teachers and students at Tibet University were prohibited from actively celebrating the Saga Dawa festival in 2004.

Travel restrictions for foreign visitors to and within the TAR were reported during the period covered by this report. The Government tightly controlled visits by foreign officials to religious sites, and official foreign delegations had few opportunities to meet monks and nuns not previously approved by the local authorities.

In July 2003, authorities reportedly closed the Ngaba Kirti Monastic School in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, and summoned its chief patron, Soepa Nagur, to Sichuan's capital city Chengdu, according to the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD). Funded in 1994 with private funds to provide traditional Tibetan and monastic education to rural residents, the school attracted the attention of local authorities in 1998, who forced the school to change its name, include secular subjects in its curriculum, and finally merge with another nearby institution.

In January, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog, the charismatic founder of the Serthar Tibetan Buddhist Institute (also known as Larung Gar) in Sichuan Province's Kardze Prefecture, died while receiving medical treatment in the provincial capital Chengdu. Founded in 1980, the Institute grew to house 10,000 monks and nuns before authorities moved to destroy structures and expel students from the site in 2001, ultimately reducing the population to approximately 4,000. After a

year's absence officially attributed to medical treatment, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog returned to the Institute in July 2002. As recently as May 2003, conflicts over attempts to rebuild some structures resulted in arrests and the enforced closure of the Institute to outsiders. After the abbot's death, Sichuan authorities forbade the province's Buddhist monks from attending his funeral; nevertheless, eyewitnesses reported that tens of thousands of Tibetan and Han Chinese monks defied the order to pay their respects.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and it is difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. While the atmosphere for lay religious practice is less restrictive than in the recent past, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high, and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

In October 2003, Tibetan monk Nyima Dragpa of Dawu County in Sichuan Province's Kardze Prefecture died while serving a 9-year sentence for state subversion. Based on a letter the monk allegedly wrote before his death, NGO and foreign media observers attributed his death to torture suffered in prison. In November 2002, Tibetan Buddhist monk Lobsang Dhargyal reportedly died of a brain hemorrhage in a "reform through labor" camp in Qinghai Province. TCHRD attributed the monk's death to torture and maltreatment while in detention. There has been no official public confirmation of or investigation into Lobsang Dhargyal's death.

The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltsen Norbu, the boy it selected in 1995, is the Panchen Lama's 11th reincarnation. The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama in 1995 as the 11th Panchen Lama (when he was 6 years old), and his whereabouts are unknown. Government officials have claimed that the boy is under government supervision, at an undisclosed location, for his own protection and attends classes as a "normal schoolboy." All requests from the international community for access to the boy to confirm his well-being have been refused. While the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize the boy identified by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama, Tibetan monks have claimed that they were forced to sign statements pledging allegiance to the boy the Government selected. The Communist Party also urged its members to support the "official" Panchen Lama. Gyaltsen Norbu made his second highly orchestrated visit to Tibetan areas in August 2003, and his public appearances were marked by a heavy security presence.

Chadrel Rinpoche, the lama accused by the Government of betraying state secrets while helping the Dalai Lama choose the incarnation of the 11th Panchen Lama, was released from prison in January 2002, according to officials. There are reports that Chadrel Rinpoche is being held under house arrest near Lhasa, but officials have not confirmed his whereabouts and refused requests from the international community to meet with him. They continue to state that Chadrel Rinpoche is studying scriptures in seclusion. In August 2003, TCHRD reported that Champa Chung, 56-year-old former assistant of Chadrel Rinpoche, remained in custody after the expiration of his original 4-year prison term in 1999.

On February 12, police arrested Choeden Rinzen, a monk at Lhasa's Ganden Monastery, for possessing a Tibetan national flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama, according to Radio Free Asia. Two friends of Choeden Rinzen reportedly were arrested with him but later released.

According to statistics published in February by the Tibet Information Network (TIN), approximately 90 of the 136 male Tibetans documented by TIN as current political prisoners are monks, former monks, or reincarnate lamas, and 4 of the 6 female prisoners are nuns or former nuns. In April TAR justice and prison officials stated that approximately 3 percent of the 2,500 judicially sentenced inmates incarcerated in the TAR's three formally designated prisons were charged with "endangering state security." The majority of those approximately 75 prisoners are monks and nuns. As in previous years, there were credible reports of imprisonment and abuse and torture of monks and nuns accused of political activism, and of prisoners who were beaten because they resisted political re-education imposed by prison authorities.

Although Tibetan Buddhists in Tibetan areas outside of the TAR enjoy relatively greater freedom of worship than their coreligionists within the TAR, religious expression by Tibetan Buddhists

outside the TAR has also at times resulted in detention and arrest. Prominent religious leader Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, arrested for his alleged connection with a series of bombings in April 2002, remains imprisoned under a death sentence with a 2-year reprieve. Tenzin Deleg's former associate, Lobsang Dondrub, was executed on January 26, 2003, for his part in the alleged bombings. Lobsang Dondrub's execution occurred in contravention of Chinese government assurances that both individuals would be afforded full due process, and that the national-level Supreme People's Court would review their sentences. In response to repeated inquiries, Chinese officials have confirmed to U.S. and E.U. officials that the reprieve of Tenzin Deleg's death sentence will run for 2 years from the date the judgment became final. The Chinese Government has further clarified to U.S. officials that the judgment became final on January 26, 2003, when Tenzin Deleg lost his appeal before the Sichuan Higher People's Court.

In August 2003, five monks and an unidentified lay artist received sentences of 1 to 12 years' imprisonment for alleged separatist activities, including painting a Tibetan national flag, possessing pictures of the Dalai Lama, and distributing materials calling for Tibetan independence. The monks—Zoepa, Tsogphel, Sherab Dargye, Oezer, and Migyur—were all from Khangmar Monastery in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

Many other religious figures remained imprisoned during the period covered by this report, including Sonam Phuntsog, a Buddhist teacher in Kardze County, Sichuan Province, arrested in 1999 after leading a protest; Lhasa orphanage owners Jigme Tenzin and Nyima Choedron, convicted in 2002 of "espionage and endangering state security"; and approximately 10 persons detained in October 2002 in Kardze Town, Sichuan Province, in connection with long-life ceremonies for the Dalai Lama sponsored by foreign Tibetan Buddhists.

Since Falun Gong was banned in 1999, there have been reports of detentions of Falun Gong practitioners in the TAR. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in the TAR is believed to be small.

There were some positive developments regarding prisoners. On April 18, authorities reportedly released Tibetan Buddhist monk Ngawang Oezer from TAR Prison upon completion of a 15-year sentence for participating in pro-independence activities at Drepung Monastery. In August 2003, authorities had announced that Ngawang Oezer's sentence had been reduced by 2 years.

On February 24, authorities released Tibetan Buddhist nun Phuntsog Nyidrol from Lhasa's TAR Prison approximately 1 year before her sentence was due to expire. She had received a 9-year sentence for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in support of the Dalai Lama in 1989. Authorities extended her sentence to 17 years after she and other nuns recorded songs about their devotion to Tibet and the Dalai Lama in 1993 but reduced that sentence by 1 year in 2001.

In 2003, Tsurphu Monastery monks Panam and Thubten, arrested in 2002 on suspicion of assisting in the Karmapa Lama's flight to India, were released from prison and have returned to their monastery. In September 2003, authorities reportedly released long-serving Tibetan nun Lhamo Namdrol from prison upon conclusion of her 12-year sentence.

In February Nyima Choedron, former nun and co-director of the Gyatso Children's home, received a 1-year sentence reduction, according to TAR officials. In August 2003, the Government announced that the monk Jamphel Jangchub, imprisoned in Lhasa's TAR Prison for joining a pro-independence group in Drepung Monastery in the 1980s, received a sentence reduction of 3 years.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism. The Christian population in Tibetan areas of China is extremely small. There are some reports that converts to Christianity have encountered societal pressure, and some converts reportedly have been disinherited by their families.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas, using both focused external pressure regarding abuses and support for positive trends within the country. In regular exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, U.S. diplomatic personnel consistently urged both Central Government and local authorities to respect religious freedom in Tibetan areas.

The Ambassador and the Consul General have each raised the case of Tenzin Deleg during meetings with local officials on several occasions. Each time, U.S. officials urged local authorities to abide by Chinese government commitments that the imprisoned religious leader receive due process under the law. Senior State Department officers traveled to Lhasa in September 2003 for discussions with TAR authorities and with monks and practitioners at important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.

Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination. In January, following reports that Tibetans forcibly repatriated to China from Nepal in May 2003 had been subject to imprisonment and torture, the Ambassador lodged a protest in Beijing and Consulate Chengdu made a formal, written inquiry to the TAR authorities.

U.S. diplomatic personnel stationed in the country maintain contacts with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in the Tibetan areas, and they traveled to the TAR and other Tibetan areas 13 times during the period covered by this report to monitor the status of religious freedom.

Development and exchange programs administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Department of State aim to strengthen Tibetan communities in China and preserve their environment and culture heritage. Both are inextricably linked to Tibet's Buddhist religious tradition. The U.S. Consulate in Chengdu has also promoted religious dialogue through its exchange visitor program, which financed the travel of two prominent scholars of traditional Tibetan culture and religion to the U.S.

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