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2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: China

Executive Summary

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Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet are appended at the end of this report. Given the scope and severity of reported religious freedom violations specific to Xinjiang this year, a separate section on the region is also included in this report.

The constitution states citizens have freedom of religious belief but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities” and does not define “normal.” The government continued to exercise control over religion and restrict the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents when the government perceived these as threatening state or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests, according to nongovernmental organization (NGO) and international media reports. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register with the government and officially permitted to hold worship services. There continued to be reports of deaths in custody and that the government tortured, physically abused, arrested, detained, sentenced to prison, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices.

Multiple media and NGOs estimated that since April 2017, the government detained at least 800,000 and up to possibly more than 2 million Uighurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and members of other Muslim groups, mostly Chinese citizens, in specially built or converted detention facilities in Xinjiang and subjected them to forced disappearance,

torture, physical abuse, and prolonged detention without trial because of their religion and ethnicity. There were reports of deaths among detainees. Authorities maintained extensive and invasive security and surveillance, particularly in Xinjiang, in part to gain information regarding individuals’ religious adherence and practices. The government continued to cite concerns over the “three evils” of “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” as grounds to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Muslims in Xinjiang. Authorities in Xinjiang punished schoolchildren, university students, and their family members for praying. They barred youths from participating in religious activities, including fasting during Ramadan. The government sought the forcible repatriation of Uighur Muslims from foreign countries and detained some of those who returned.

Religious groups reported deaths in or shortly after detentions, disappearances, and arrests and stated authorities tortured Tibetan Buddhists, Christians, and members of Falun Gong. The Church of Almighty God reported authorities subjected hundreds of their members to “torture or forced indoctrination.” Although authorities continued to block information about the number of self-immolations of Tibetan Buddhists, including Buddhist monks, there were reportedly four self-immolations during the year. The government began enforcing revised regulations in February that govern the activities of religious groups and their members. Religious leaders and groups stated these regulations increased restrictions on their ability to practice their religions, including a new requirement for religious group members to seek approval to travel abroad and a prohibition on “accepting domination by external forces.” Christian church leaders stated the government increased monitoring even before the new regulations came into effect, causing many churches to cease their normal activities. Authorities continued to arrest Christians and enforce more limitations on their activities, including requiring Christian churches to install surveillance cameras to enable daily police monitoring, and compelling members of house churches and other Christians to sign documents renouncing their Christian faith and church membership. An ongoing campaign of church closings continued during the year, and authorities removed crosses and other Christian symbols from churches, with Henan Province a particular focus area of such activity. In September the Holy See reached a provisional agreement with the government that reportedly would resolve a decades-long dispute concerning the authority to appoint bishops.

Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities. In Xinjiang, tension between Uighur Muslims and Han Chinese continued.

The Vice President, Secretary of State, Ambassador, and other embassy and consulates general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom. On July 26, the Vice President said, “Religious persecution is growing in both scope and scale in the world’s most populous country, the People’s Republic of China...Together with other religious minorities, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians are often under attack.” On September 21, the Secretary said, “Hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions of Uighurs are held against their will in so-called re-education camps, where they’re forced to endure severe political indoctrination and other awful abuses. Their religious beliefs are decimated. And we’re concerned too about the intense new

government crackdown on Christians in China, which includes heinous actions like closing churches, burning Bibles, and ordering followers to sign papers renouncing their faith.” A statement from the July 24-26 U.S. Government-hosted Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom said, “Many members of religious minority groups in China – including Uighurs, Hui, and Kazakh Muslims; Tibetan Buddhists; Catholics; Protestants; and Falun Gong – face severe repression and discrimination because of their beliefs. These communities consistently report incidents, in which the authorities allegedly torture, physically abuse, arbitrarily arrest, detain, sentence to prison, or harass adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and peaceful practices. Authorities also restrict travel and interfere with the selection, education, and veneration of religious leaders for many religious groups....” The Ambassador and other embassy and consulate general officials met with Chinese officials, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, family members of religious prisoners, NGOs, and others to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 28, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 billion (July 2018 estimate). According to the State Council Information Office’s (SCIO) report on religious policies and practices, published in April, there are more than 200 million religious believers in the country. Many experts, however, believe official estimates understate the total number of religious adherents. The U.S. government estimated in 2010 that Buddhists comprise 18.2 percent of the population, Christians 5.1 percent, Muslims 1.8 percent, and followers of folk religion 21.9 percent. According to a February 2017 estimate by the international NGO Freedom House, there are more than 350 million religious believers in the country, including 185-250 million Chinese Buddhists, 60-80 million Protestants, 21-23 million Muslims, 7-20 million Falun Gong practitioners, 12 million Catholics, 6-8 million Tibetan Buddhists, and hundreds of millions who follow various folk traditions. According to 2017 data from the Jewish Virtual Library, the country’s Jewish population is 2,700.

SCIO’s report found the number of Protestants to be 38 million. Among these, there are 20 million Protestant Christians affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-sanctioned umbrella organization for all officially recognized Protestant churches, according to information on TSPM’s website in March 2017. According to a 2014 State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) statistic, more than 5.7 million Catholics worship in sites registered by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic

Association (CCPA), the state-sanctioned organization for all officially recognized Catholic churches. The SCIO's report states there are six million Catholics, although nongovernment estimates suggest there are 10-12 million Catholics, approximately half of whom practice in non-CCPA affiliated churches. Accurate estimates on the numbers of Catholics and Protestants as well as other faiths are difficult to calculate because many adherents practice exclusively at home or in churches that are not state sanctioned.

According to SCIO's report, there are 10 ethnic minorities in which the majority practices Islam, and these 10 groups total more than 20 million persons. Other sources indicate almost all of the Muslims are Sunni. The two largest Muslim ethnic minorities are Hui and Uighur, with Hui Muslims concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. SARA estimates the Muslim Hui population at 10.6 million.

While there is no reliable government breakdown of the Buddhist population by branch, the vast majority of Buddhists are adherents of Mahayana Buddhism, according to the Pew Research Center.

Prior to the government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, the government estimated there were 70 million adherents. Falun Gong sources estimate that tens of millions continue to practice privately, and Freedom House estimates 7-20 million practitioners.

Some ethnic minorities retain traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan Province and Buluotuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Media sources report Buddhism, particularly Tibetan Buddhism, is growing in popularity among the Han Chinese population.

Local and regional figures for the number of religious followers, even state-sanctioned legal religions, are unclear and purposely kept opaque by authorities. Local governments do not release these statistics, and even official religious organizations do not have accurate numbers. The Pew Research Center and other observers say many religious groups often are underreported.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution states citizens have “freedom of religious belief,” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities.” The constitution does not define “normal.” It says religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution provides for the right to hold or not to hold a religious belief. State organs, public organizations, and individuals may not discriminate against citizens “who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion.” The law does not allow legal action to be taken against the government based on the religious freedom protections afforded by the constitution. Criminal law allows the state to sentence government officials to up to two years in prison if they violate a citizen's religious freedom.

CCP members and members of the armed forces are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practice. Members found to belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion, although these rules are not universally enforced. The vast majority of public office holders are CCP members, and membership is widely considered a prerequisite for success in a government career. These restrictions on religious belief and practice also apply to retired CCP cadres and party members.

The law bans certain religious or spiritual groups. The criminal law defines banned groups as “cult organizations” and provides for criminal prosecution of individuals belonging to such groups and punishment of up to life in prison. There are no published criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. A national security law explicitly bans “cult organizations.” The CCP maintains an extralegal, party-run security apparatus to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and other such organizations. The government continues to ban Falun Gong, the Guanyin Method religious group (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), and Zhong Gong (a *qigong* exercise discipline). The government also considers several Christian groups to be “evil cults,” including the Shouters, The Church of Almighty God (also known as Eastern Lightning), Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church (Quan Fanwei Jiaohui), Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (San Ban Puren), Association of Disciples, Lord God religious group, Established King Church, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), Family of Love, and South China Church.

The Counterterrorism Law describes “religious extremism” as the ideological basis of terrorism that uses “distorted religious teachings or other means to incite hatred, or discrimination, or advocate violence.”

Regulations require religious groups to register with the government. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services. These five associations operate under the direction of the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD). Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official “patriotic religious association” or Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities. The government does not have a state-sanctioned “patriotic religious association” for Judaism. The country’s laws and policies do not provide a mechanism for religious groups independent of the five official “patriotic religious associations” to obtain legal status.

In March as part of a restructuring of the central government, the Central Committee of the CCP announced the merger of SARA, which was previously under the purview of the State Council, into the CCP’s UFWD, placing responsibility for religious regulations directly under the party. SARA, while subsumed into the UFWD, continued to conduct work under the same name. This administrative change at the national level was followed in the spring and autumn with parallel changes at the provincial and local levels.

All religious organizations are required to register with one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations, all of which SARA oversees through its provincial and local offices. The revised Regulations on Religious Affairs announced in 2017 and implemented on February 1, 2018, state that registered religious organizations are allowed to possess property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations. According to regulations, religious organizations must submit information about the organization’s historical background, members, doctrines, key publications, minimum funding requirements, and government sponsor, which must be one of the five “patriotic religious associations.” According to SARA, as of April 2016, there are more than 360,000 clergy, 140,000 places of worship, and 5,500 registered religious groups in the country.

The State Council’s revisions to the Regulations on Religious Affairs strengthen already existing requirements for unregistered religious groups and require unregistered groups be affiliated with one of the five state-sanctioned religious associations to legally conduct religious activities. Individuals who participate in unsanctioned religious activities are subject to criminal and administrative penalties. The regulations stipulate any form of illegal activities or illegal properties should be confiscated and a fine between one to three times the value of the illegal incomes/properties should be imposed. The revised regulation adds that, if the illegal incomes/properties cannot be identified, a fine below 50,000 renminbi (RMB) (\$7,300) should be imposed. The regulations provide grounds for authorities to penalize property owners renting space to unregistered religious groups by confiscating illegal incomes and properties and levying fines between 20,000-200,000 RMB (\$2,900-\$29,100). The revisions instate new requirements for members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and prohibit “accepting domination by external forces.”

The revised Regulations on Religious Affairs include new registration requirements for religious schools that allow only the five state-sanctioned religious associations or their lower-level affiliates to form religious schools. The regulations specify all religious structures, including clergy housing, may not be transferred, mortgaged, or utilized as investments. The revisions place new restrictions on religious groups conducting business or making investments by stipulating the property and income of religious groups, schools, and venues may not be distributed and should be used for activities and charity befitting their purposes; any individual or organization that donates funds to build religious venues is prohibited from owning and using the venues. The revisions also impose a limit on foreign donations to religious groups, stating that any such donations must be used for activities that authorities deem appropriate for the group and the site. The regulations ban donations from foreign groups and individuals if the donations come with any attached conditions and state any donations exceeding 100,000 RMB (\$14,500) must be submitted to the local government for review and approval. Religious groups, religious schools, and religious activity sites must not accept donations from foreign sources with conditions attached. If authorities find a group has illegally accepted a donation, the regulations grant authorities the ability to confiscate the donation and fine the recipient group between one to three times the value of the unlawful donations or, if the amount cannot be determined, a fine of 50,000 RMB (\$7,300).

Additionally, the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs require that religious activity “must not harm national security.” The revisions expand the prescribed steps to address support for “religious extremism,” leaving “extremism” undefined. These steps include recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials. The revised regulations include a new article placing limits on the online activities of religious groups for the first time, requiring activities be approved by the provincial religious affairs bureau. The revisions also restrict the publication of religious material to guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration.

Regulations concerning religion also vary by province; many provinces updated their regulations during the year following the enforcement of the revised regulations in February. In addition to the five nationally recognized religions, local governments, at their discretion, permit certain unregistered religious communities to carry out religious practices. Examples include local governments in Xinjiang and in Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong Provinces that allow members of Orthodox Christian communities to participate in unregistered religious activities. The central government classifies worship of Mazu, a folk deity with Taoist roots, as “cultural heritage” rather than religious practice.

SARA states through a policy posted on its website that family and friends have the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government.

According to the law, inmates have the right to believe in a religion and maintain their religious beliefs while in custody. According to the new regulations implemented February 1, proselytizing in public or holding religious activities in unregistered places of worship is not permitted. In practice, offenders are subject to administrative and criminal penalties.

Religious and social regulations permit official “patriotic religious associations” to engage in activities, such as building places of worship, training religious leaders, publishing literature, and providing social services to local communities. The CCP’s UFWD, SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations.

An amendment to the criminal law and a judicial interpretation by the national Supreme People’s Procuratorate and the Supreme People’s Court published in 2016 criminalizes the act of forcing others to wear “extremist” garments. Neither the amendment nor the judicial interpretation defines what garments or symbols the law considers “extremist.”

National printing regulations restrict the publication and distribution of literature with religious content. Religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qurans, may be confiscated, and unauthorized publishing houses closed.

The government offers some subsidies for the construction of state-sanctioned places of worship and religious schools.

To establish places of worship, religious organizations must receive approval from the religious affairs department of the relevant local government both when the facility is proposed and again before any services are held at that location. Religious organizations must submit dozens of documents to register during these approval processes, including detailed management plans of their religious activities, exhaustive financial records, and personal information on all staff members. Religious communities not going through the formal registration process may not legally have a set facility or worship meeting space. Therefore, every time they want to reserve a space for worship, such as by renting a hotel or an apartment, they must seek a separate approval from government authorities for each service. Worshipping in a space without pre-approval, either through the formal registration process or by seeking an approval for each service, is considered an illegal religious activity, which may be criminally or administratively punished. By regulation, if a religious structure is to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or construction of key projects, the party responsible for demolishing the structure must consult with its local Bureau of Religious Affairs (administered by SARA) and the religious group using the structure. If all parties agree to the demolition, the party conducting the demolition must agree to rebuild the structure or provide compensation equal to its appraised market value.

The revised religious regulations implemented in February and policies enacted by the state-sanctioned religious associations inhibit children under the age of 18 from participating in religious activities and religious education. For example, one provision states that no individual may use religion to hinder the national education system and that no religious activities may be held in schools other than religious schools. At the county level, religious affairs bureaus in localities including Henan, Shandong, Anhui, and Xinjiang have released letters telling parents not to take their children under 18 to religious activities or education.

The law mandates the teaching of atheism in schools, and a CCP directive provides guidance to universities on how to prevent foreign proselytizing of university students.

The law states job applicants shall not face discrimination in hiring based on factors including religious belief.

Birth limitation policies remain in force, stating all married couples may have no more than two children, with no exceptions for ethnic or religious minorities. Women choosing to have more than two children are subject to fines ranging from one to ten times the local per capita income.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). With respect to Macau, the central government notified the UN secretary general, in part, that residents of Macau shall not be restricted in the rights and freedoms they are entitled to, unless otherwise provided for by law, and in case of restrictions, the restrictions shall not contravene the ICCPR. With respect to Hong Kong, the central government notified the secretary general, in part, that the ICCPR would also apply to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

There were reports that authorities subjected individuals to death, forced disappearances, and organ harvesting in prison because of their religious beliefs or affiliation.

According to the Church of Almighty God website, kingdomsalvation.org, a member of the Church died while in custody shortly after Guizhou authorities arrested her on an unspecified charge in March. Authorities said the unnamed person committed suicide by hanging herself, but did not allow her family to view her body. Officials reportedly told her family the government did not approve of her Christian beliefs. When her relatives questioned the government’s determination of her death as suicide, authorities threatened them with potential loss of employment and university access for their children.

According to *Minghui*, a Falun Gong publication, on January 16 police took into custody and interrogated Ye Guohua and five other Falun Gong practitioners who were doing Falun Gong exercises. Police released the five practitioners the next morning and took Ye to the Jianye Detention Center where his family believes he was brutally tortured for his Falun Gong practice. On September 8, Ye suffered what authorities said was a sudden acute illness and was sent to the hospital. Authorities allowed his family to see him briefly, and family members reported Ye was in a coma and his body was swollen. He died three days later. A local Falun Gong practitioner called the detention center to inquire about what happened to Ye and the person who answered the phone said, “He’s dead, so there’s nothing that can be done. Asking about this is just asking for trouble.”

The Church of Almighty God reported that in April CCP police secretly arrested and tortured one of its members for 25 days. The individual was sent to the hospital with severe injuries to the skull and she died several months later. The Church of Almighty God also reported that on June 27, two church members were arrested, and on July 2, one of them was “persecuted to death” in Chaoyang Municipal Detention Center.

Minghui reported that on July 4, authorities arrested and detained Ma Guilan from Hebei Province for talking to people about Falun Gong. On September 17, authorities said Ma suddenly fell ill and they took her to the hospital where she died hours later. According to the report, several officials came to the hospital and removed Ma’s organs for examination, although it was unclear what happened to those organs.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Chinese authorities have subjected prisoners of conscience including Falun Gong, Uighurs, Tibetan Buddhists, and “underground” Christians to forcible organ extraction. Former prisoners stated that while in detention, authorities subjected them to blood tests and unusual medical examinations that were then added to a database, enabling on-demand organ transplants. On December 10, an independent tribunal established by the international NGO International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China issued an interim judgement that the panel was “certain – unanimously, and sure beyond reasonable doubt – that in China, forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience has been practiced for a substantial period of time, involving a very substantial number of victims.”

In August the Association for the Defense of Human Rights and Religious Freedom (ADHRRF), an international NGO providing regular reports on the situation of the Church of Almighty God, reported that between April and August, authorities in Chongqing, Sichuan Province, detained 109 church members. Of those, 40 remained missing at year’s end.

The whereabouts of Gao Zhisheng remained unknown, although media reported it was believed he remained in the custody of state security police. Police detained Gao, a human rights lawyer who had defended members of Christian groups, Falun Gong practitioners, and other groups, in September 2017.

There were reports that authorities tortured detainees, including by depriving them of food, water, and sleep.

The Church of Almighty God reported authorities subjected 525 of its members to “torture or forced indoctrination” during the year. The Church also reported members suffered miscarriages after police subjected them to “torture and abuse” in detention facilities.

The Globe and Mail reported in September that authorities tortured a Canadian citizen who is a Falun Gong practitioner during her 18-month pretrial detention in Beijing. While detained, authorities reportedly initially deprived the individual of food and water, and later pushed her to the ground and pepper sprayed her. Officials arrested her in February 2017 on charges of “organizing or using a cult to undermine implementation of the law.” After the arrest, her husband, whom she stated she believed turned her in to authorities, reportedly transferred all of her property and company shares to his name.

According to *The Epoch Times*, in September a court sentenced Chen Huixia, a Falun Gong practitioner in Hebei Province, to 3.5 years in prison for “using an evil cult to undermine law enforcement,” according to Chen’s daughter. Amnesty International said detention center officials tortured Chen and strapped her to an iron chair so that she was immobile. Chen had been held with limited access to family and lawyers since 2016.

According to *Minghui*, detained Falun Gong practitioners to various methods of physical and psychological coercion, such as sleep deprivation, in attempts to force them to renounce their beliefs.

In June Pastor Yang Hua (also known as Li Guozhi) of the Livingstone Church – the largest unregistered church in Guizhou Province before the government shut it down in 2015 – completed his 2.5-year prison sentence for “divulging state secrets.” According to Yang Hua, prison officials tortured him before and after his sentence to extract a confession to the alleged crime. As a result of this as well as inadequate medical care in prison, Yang Hua developed vasculitis, leading to near paralysis of his legs, and became ill with diabetes. His lawyers stated that authorities continued to surveil Yang Hua following his release from prison.

Police arrested and otherwise detained leaders and members of religious groups, often those connected with groups not registered, as part of the state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations.” There were reports police used violence and beatings during arrest and detention. Reportedly, authorities used vague or insubstantial charges, sometimes in connection with religious activity, to convict and sentence leaders and members of religious groups to years in prison. Some previously detained persons were released.

The Political Prisoner Database (PPDB) maintained by human rights NGO Dui Hua Foundation contained the following number of imprisoned religious practitioners at year’s end: 310 Protestants, 205 Church of Almighty God members, 136 Muslims, 22 Buddhists, and nine Catholics, compared with 308 Protestants, 277 Church of Almighty God members, 107 Muslims, 30 Buddhists, and nine Catholics at the end of 2017. According to Dui Hua, these numbers are based on Dui Hua’s classification system for inclusion in the PPDB and are not the total number of religious prisoners. The number of Muslim prisoners did not include 505 Uighur and 234 Kazakh prisoners, which Dui Hua classified as “ethnic prisoners.” According to Dui Hua, these figures did not account for Muslims in “vocational skill education training centers.” The PPDB listed 3,486 Falun Gong practitioners imprisoned at year’s end, compared with 3,516 at the end of 2017. Dui Hua defined imprisoned religious practitioners as “people persecuted for holding religious beliefs that are not officially sanctioned.”

Falun Gong reported that during the year authorities arrested or harassed approximately 9,000 citizens for refusing to renounce Falun Gong. According to *Minghui*, authorities arrested 4,848 Falun Gong practitioners and harassed an additional 4,127. Of those arrested, 2,414 remained in detention at year’s end.

According to the *Epoch Times*, Sichuan Province security officials detained 78 Falun Gong practitioners in the province during the first six months of the year.

International Falun Gong-affiliated NGOs and international media reported detentions of Falun Gong practitioners continued to increase around “sensitive” dates. Authorities instructed neighborhood communities to report Falun Gong members to officials.

The Church of Almighty God reported authorities arrested 11,111 of its members during the year, of which 2,392 remained in custody.

On December 31, Radio Free Asia reported more than 100 riot police and People’s Armed Police in Yunnan’s Weishan County raided three mosques and forcibly evicted Hui Muslims for engaging in what they said were “illegal religious activities.” Authorities injured several individuals who resisted the eviction. Video footage showed police charging into a crowd of unarmed civilians and shoving, dragging, and beating them.

On December 24, two police officers beat and kicked a Christian woman who was protesting the demolition of the TSPM church in Luyi County, Zhoukou City, Henan Province.

Radio Free Asia reported that on September 5, uniformed officers in Nanyang, Henan Province, conducted raids on at least four Protestant churches, physically subduing passersby who asked about the raid.

According to the NGO International Christian Concern, on November 21, more than 100 uniformed government officers raided the Beimen Catholic Church in the city of Ji'an in Jiangxi Province and injured four elderly Catholics who were defending the church.

The New York Times reported on December 9, authorities in Sichuan Province raided the Early Rain Covenant Church – Chengdu's highest-membership unregistered church – and detained more than 100 leaders, seminary students, and congregants. This was the third time since May that officials raided the church for lacking proper registration. ChinaAid reported authorities arrested 200 church members in May and another 17 in June. One detainee publicly said officials struck him approximately 30 times as they interrogated him. According to church members, police struck another individual in the face even though he had not resisted arrest. In May authorities arrested lead Pastor Wang Yi, an outspoken critic of the government's controls on religion, on allegations of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” In December Wang and his wife Jiang Rong were both charged with “inciting subversion of state power,” which carries a potential sentence of life imprisonment. As of year's end, the whereabouts and conditions of many detainees remained unknown, including Wang and his wife, who were being held in unspecified locations.

In anticipation of his arrest, Pastor Wang Yi wrote a letter titled “My Declaration of Faithful Disobedience,” which the Early Rain Church published following his detention on December 9. He wrote, “I am filled with anger and disgust at the persecution of the church by this Communist regime, at the wickedness of their depriving people of the freedoms of religion and of conscience...I am not interested in changing any political or legal institutions in China ... I'm not even interested in the question of when the Communist regime's policies persecuting the church will change. Regardless of which regime I live under now or in the future, as long as the secular government continues to persecute the church, violating human consciences that belong to God alone, I will continue my faithful disobedience.”

Bitter Winter, an online magazine on religious liberty and human rights in China, reported that pastors across the country released a joint declaration in August supporting religious liberty and condemning the CCP's revised Regulations on Religious Affairs. At year's end, more than 600 pastors, ministers, and church elders had signed the statement. According to the report, the Bureau of Religious Affairs in every region was strictly monitoring all individuals who signed the letter and prohibiting them from traveling to Chengdu to support the Early Rain Church. A statement released by the Early Rain Church said authorities had questioned and pressured more than half of the signatories. Reportedly, authorities also raided and shut down churches because their pastors had signed the joint declaration.

In March authorities in Yunnan Province convicted and sentenced Protestant pastor Cao “John” Sanqiang, a U.S. lawful permanent resident and Christian leader, to seven years in prison for “organizing others to illegally cross the border.”

In January Radio Free Asia reported defense attorney Xiao Yunyang said the Yun County People’s Court in Yunnan Province sentenced six Christians to up to 13 years in prison for involvement in the Three Grades of Servants, which the government had designated a “cult.” Authorities in Yunnan reportedly told lawyers defending the accused their licenses to practice would be reviewed. Attorney Li Guisheng said the court revoked the status of lawyers defending Christians in a similar case in Fengqing County, Yunnan Province. In April a court in Dali, Yunnan Province, sentenced Tu Yan to two years of imprisonment for participating in Three Grades of Servants activities. As part of a case that involved more than 100 Christians in Yunnan Province, authorities arrested Tu in 2016, and held her in a detention center for more than 20 months before sentencing her. Authorities originally charged Tu with “organizing and using a cult organization to undermine law enforcement.”

In April the government sentenced Su Tianfu, Copastor with Yang Hua of the Livingstone Church, to a yearlong suspended sentence and a further six months of residential surveillance for “illegally possessing state secrets.” Authorities also fined Su and Yang 7,053,710.68 RMB (\$1.03 million) for collecting “illegal” donations from congregation members. The government rejected Su’s appeal in which he said church members voluntarily donated the money to fund church activities.

On November 16, *Crux* reported that Catholic bishop Peter Shao Zhumin of Wenzhou, recognized by the Vatican but not government authorities, had again been taken into custody. The article stated Shao had been “subjected to several days of interrogation as in the Cultural Revolution” but gave no further details. Authorities denied knowledge of his whereabouts. According to the news agency *Union of Catholic Asian (UCA) News*, authorities released Shao on November 23 after detaining him for 14 days. News sources said security officials detained Shao before Holy Week (April 9-15) 2017 and held him five days. Authorities again subsequently detained Shao in May 2017 and released him on January 3, 2018. Authorities have detained Shao several times since September 2016, reportedly to prevent him from assuming control of Wenzhou Diocese following the death of Bishop Vincent Zhu Weifan.

UCA News also reported that Catholic priest Lu Danhua, who was taken into custody by officials of the Qingtian Religious Affairs Bureau in Wenzhou, Zhejiang in December 2017, was released November 22. According to the report, a source said authorities detained Lu because they wanted to replace him at the Qingtian church with a priest from the CCPA.

Media reported police detained Vincenzo Guo Xijin, the Vatican-appointed bishop of the Mindong area of Fujian Province, on March 26 after he reportedly declined to jointly lead an Easter ceremony with government-approved Bishop Vincenzo Zhan Silu, who was not recognized by the Holy See. Police released him the next day. In a compromise, authorities allowed Guo to lead the ceremony, provided he kept it “low key” and agreed not to wear his bishop’s insignia.

On June 3, police arrested a Baptist preacher Liang Ziliang and his wife, Li Yinxiu, in Heshan, Guangdong Province, for distributing brochures about Christianity and carrying banners protesting abortion in a local park, according to ChinaAid. Authorities held the couple at a detention center for several days.

In June Xuanwu District Court, Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province, sentenced Falun Gong practitioner Ma Zehnyu to three years and fined him 30,000 RMB (\$4,400) for mailing letters in defense of Falun Gong to some of China’s top leaders. The Nanjing Intermediate People’s Court upheld his conviction in August. Ma’s lawyers requested to meet with him in November, but authorities denied the request. As of year’s end, Ma was serving his sentence in Suzhou Prison, Jiangsu Province. Ma, who had been imprisoned previously, was arrested in September 2017 and authorities reportedly told him, “This time, we will let you die in jail.”

On March 15, police arrested a Liaoning Province woman, Zhou Jinxia, after she traveled from Dalian to Beijing to attempt to share her Christian faith with President Xi Jinping, reported the *Gospel Herald*. Zhou held up a sign in front of Zhongnanhai, the former imperial garden, which said, “God loves the people of the world and is calling out to Xi Jinping.” Authorities immediately transported her back to Dalian where authorities criminally charged her.

Radio Free Asia reported in July that authorities in Sichuan Province detained two Tibetan businessmen after they found the men in possession of photographs of the Dalai Lama.

The government did not recognize religious groups not affiliated with the “patriotic religious associations” including unregistered Protestant (also known as “house” churches), Catholic, Muslim, and other groups, and continued to close down or hinder their activities. At times, the closures reportedly were because the group or its activities were unregistered and other times because the place of worship reportedly lacked necessary permits.

Some local governments continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations. Some officials reportedly still denied the existence of unregistered churches. Although SARA said family and friends had the right to worship together at home – including prayer and Bible study – without registering with the government, authorities still regularly harassed and detained small groups that did so.

In implementing the new regulations on religious affairs, authorities required unregistered religious groups to disband, leaving their congregations with the sole option of attending services under a state-sanctioned religious leader, rather than allow it to alter its legal status as an intact religious community.

ChinaAid reported that after the religious affairs regulations went into effect on February 1, officials in 19 towns in Henan Province went door-to-door, urging Christians to attend the government-sponsored TSPM-affiliated Church instead of unregistered churches. Reportedly, many Christians subsequently met secretly in their homes, afraid of public security agents.

Sources said that local Public Security Bureaus in Liaoning Province began intensifying efforts to force the closure of dozens of unregistered “underground” churches and detained their pastors even before the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs went into effect February 1. According to *Bitter Winter*, since March, authorities shut down at least 40 unregistered churches across Liaoning Province in cities such as Donggang, Anshan, Dandong, and Shenyang.

According to a September Voice of America report, there were widespread reports indicating the government of Henan was waging a campaign against the province’s Christians by taking down crosses, demolishing churches, and erasing Christian slogans from church buildings. According to *Bitter Winter*, in the past years there was the most severe “persecution against Christianity” in Henan Province.

In late July religious affairs officials raided Chongqing Aiyan House Church and issued an order for the church to end all “illegal” religious activities. Citing the new regulations, the officials told congregants they were conducting religious activities at an unregistered location and ordered them to attend religious services at a TSPM church instead. Authorities warned congregants authorities would arrest them if they did not comply.

On February 4, police shut down another house church in Qingxi Town, Dongguan, Guangdong Province, and dismissed more than 80 congregation members, warning them against future assembly.

ChinaAid reported authorities in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, raided Dao’en Church on September 7, saying the Church had not registered with the government. Authorities closed three of the Church’s five branches and pressured landlords to not renew leases for the Church, according to the report. ChinaAid earlier reported authorities had fined the pastor and another minister of Dao’en Church 10,000 RMB (\$1,500) and threatened to confiscate the Church’s offerings.

Radio Free Asia reported that on September 9, authorities in Beijing shut down Zion Church, a large unregistered Protestant church led by Pastor Jin “Ezra” Mingzhi, saying it had broken rules by organizing mass gatherings without registering with authorities. A church elder surnamed Yi said more than 100 police officers entered the church and detained some church members who tried to stop them shutting it down. The church’s landlord canceled the contract even though the terms of the contract had not yet expired.

Radio Free Asia reported in February that authorities in Shenzhen ordered a 3,000-member Protestant church, the Shekou One Country International Church, to close after a fire and safety inspection. Also in February, authorities in Henan Province fined

a Protestant house church in Yuzhou, citing violations of building and safety regulations, and stating the building was an illegal structure because the church failed to obtain required permissions when it was built.

According to a source, local authorities in Liaoning Province charged underground church leaders with taking members' money under false pretenses. ChinaAid reported that on August 20, authorities visited a church in Shenyang they said was an “unapproved venue.” Officials deemed church offerings illegal and forced the church to close by August 23. On December 31, Radio Free Asia reported authorities sealed three mosques in Yunnan's Weishan County after a protest, to prevent further use as they were pending demolition at year's end. A local source reportedly said local Muslims had submitted the right paperwork to register the mosques but were unsuccessful, and that the local state-sanctioned Islamic Association of China (IAC) approved of the closures.

The *South China Morning Post* reported in August hundreds of Hui Muslims gathered outside the Weizhou Grand Mosque in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region to protest its demolition. The mosque had been recently rebuilt, the second to replace Weizhou's 600-year-old mosque that was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The article said although the government seemed to support the mosque's construction in 2015, government officials said the mosque had not been granted the necessary planning and construction permits. After days of negotiation, authorities and religious leaders agreed on an alternative plan: instead of demolishing the mosque, the government would revamp the mosque and construction would only take place once everyone was happy with the renovation plan. The government initially proposed removing eight of the mosque's nine domes, but the local community opposed the idea.

According to a Radio Free Asia report, local believers in Henan said authorities demolished or shut down over 100 churches and crosses in August.

According to the Association for the Defense of Human and Religious Rights, on September 16, authorities in Zhengzhou, Henan Province demolished Yangzhai Zhen Jesus Church after forcing members to agree to the demolition by threatening their families' livelihood.

ChinaAid reported that on September 9, approximately 100 officials from the religious affairs and public security bureaus attempted to break into Dali Christian Church, in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, but more than 400 church members stopped them. The officials left after handing the church a document that said the building was not a legal religious activities site and the religious department had not approved the day's speaker, both violations of the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs. Church members therefore immediately had to cease holding “illegal” religious events.

Bitter Winter reported that from October 28 to November 1, authorities shut down or sealed off 35 Buddhist temples and memorial temples in the city of Xinmi, Henan Province.

ChinaAid reported that on Sunday, January 14, more than 20 government agents closed an unregistered church in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, interrupting a service led by Lou Siping. They informed the Christians gathered there that the building had not been registered and took 30 church members to the police station for questioning. Authorities later demanded the church's landlord cancel the church lease.

In January police and local officials dynamited the 50,000-member Golden Lampstand (Jindengtai) Church in Linfen, Shanxi Province, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide. The state-run *Global Times* reported the destruction was part of a campaign against “illegal buildings.” This church did not register with TSPM and reportedly had been involved in a dispute with local officials, who refused to grant the building permits when it was originally constructed.

Bitter Winter reported the United Front Work Department of Shaanxi Province issued a document outlining a campaign against Buddhist and Daoist religious sites in the Qinling Mountains that the department said violated construction or processing regulations. In July authorities destroyed Longhua Temple of Taiyi Town, Chang'an District, Xi'an City, saying it did not have a permit. At the end of August authorities sent 100 armed police officers and two excavators to destroy the Jade Buddha Temple in Huyi District of Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province. Several monks who lived at the temple were left homeless and, according to *Bitter Winter* sources, local villagers were not allowed to admit monks into their homes.

ChinaAid reported government officials in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang Province, destroyed the St. Theresa Convent on December 18-19. Nuns living at the convent received an eviction notice on the morning of December 18, and by 11:00 p.m., authorities began demolishing the site. According to the report, church members said they believed authorities destroyed the convent to put pressure on congregations not registered with the government. Following the convent's demolition, the nuns were left temporarily homeless.

A number of Catholic churches and bishops appointed by the pope remained unable to register with the CCPA. The government and the Holy See still did not have diplomatic relations, and the Vatican had no representative in the country. In September the Holy See and the China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs both announced that the two sides had reached a provisional agreement that would resolve a decades-long dispute concerning the authority to appoint bishops. Neither provided details of the provisional agreement. When speaking to media in late September, Pope Francis said there would be a “dialogue” on bishops who would be named by the pope. At year's end, there was no official explanation on what the mechanism would be for the Vatican and the government to make decisions regarding appointment of bishops. The existing government regulation on the Election and Consecration of Bishops requires candidate bishops to publicly pledge to support the CCP. Also in September the Vatican said the pope would be lifting the excommunication of seven bishops who had been ordained without the pope's authority. The Vatican subsequently appointed two of these men to lead dioceses and appointed the bishops it had formerly appointed in those dioceses (including Bishop Gua of Mingdon) as auxiliary bishops.

In an interview in February, retired Archbishop of Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kun condemned talks between the Holy See and the Chinese government. Zen expressed concerns that a deal between the Holy See and the government would give too much power to authorities and would place the country’s Catholics in a “birdcage.”

Unofficially, authorities tolerated members of foreigner groups meeting for private religious celebrations. International churches received heavy scrutiny, as authorities forced them to require passport checks and registration for members to prevent Chinese nationals from attending “foreigner” services.

In May SARA released draft Measures on the Administration of Foreigners’ Group Religious Activities in the Mainland Territory of the People’s Republic of China. These regulations, which would apply to religious activities of groups containing 50 or more foreigners, would update regulations last issued in 1991. The draft amendments stipulate where groups may hold religious activities, who can preside over and attend these activities, and who would be responsible for reporting activities to authorities and what kind of information about the participants they would be required to provide. To obtain approval for their activities, groups would need to name three representatives who do not possess diplomatic immunity. Foreign groups would need to allow the corresponding state-sanctioned religious association to assign a Chinese religious professional to preside over the function. All other Chinese citizens would be barred from attending the activities of these foreign groups. As of the end of the year, SARA had not announced the implementation of these regulations.

The government continued to recognize as “lawful” only those religious activities it sanctioned and controlled through the “patriotic religious associations” or otherwise. Government-accredited religious personnel had to conduct such activities and only in government-approved places of religious activity.

SARA continued to maintain statistics on registered religious groups. According to the SCIO’s report on religious policies and practice released in September 2017, there were 21 officially recognized Protestant seminaries, 57,000 clerical personnel, and 60,000 churches and other meeting places. This report stated there were 91 religious schools in the country approved by SARA, including nine Catholic schools. This report also stated there were six national level religious colleges. Civil society groups reported the government closed CCPA-affiliated seminaries in Shanghai and Chengdu, Sichuan Province. Although there were two CCPA seminaries in Beijing, civil society regarded one of them to be primarily used as the CCPA’s propaganda for international visitors.

The state-run *Global Times* quoted Bishop Guo Jincai, Secretary General of the Bishops Conference of the Catholic Church in China, as stating there were 61 (CCPA-affiliated) Catholic bishops, 12 of them over the age of 80. The Vatican did not previously recognize eight of these bishops, and had excommunicated three of them. *Crux*, an online newspaper reporting on the Catholic Church, reported in September more than 37 Catholic bishops remained independent of the CCPA. In some locations, local authorities reportedly pressured unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce all ordinations approved by the Holy See.

The SCIO report also estimated there were 35,000 mosques, 57,000 imams, and 10 Quran institutes (religious seminaries under the auspices of IAC) in the country.

Religious groups reported “patriotic religious associations” continued to be subject to CCP interference in matters of doctrine, theology, and religious practice. Official “patriotic religious associations” regularly reviewed sermons and sometimes required church leaders to attend education sessions with religious bureau officials. They also closely monitored and sometimes blocked the ability of religious leaders to meet freely with foreigners.

As part of its efforts to implement the central government’s policy of Sinicization of religions, at a forum in Guizhou in September, TSPM leaders highlighted what they said was TSPM’s important role in helping China’s Christianity get rid of foreign influence during the last 68 years and helping Christian churches to truly gain sovereignty while strengthening Christians’ patriotism. Religious scholars said they interpreted this statement as informal guidance for Christians to curtail all interactions with international Christian groups.

At the end of August in Jiaozuo City, Henan Province, CCP officials forcibly occupied and converted multiple TSPM churches into communist party schools, cultural centers, and activity hubs. *Bitter Winter* reported that in September at least 20 churches in Dengzhou City and more than 138 churches in Luoyang City, including some government-approved TSPM churches, were repurposed to suit government needs.

According to sources, Northeast China had fewer unregistered churches than other parts of the country. While still strictly controlled, the northeastern religious groups had reportedly enjoyed relatively more autonomy over their sermons and practices in past years. Sources indicated that authorities closed some Sunday schools in Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang Provinces. According to sources, until July authorities in Northeast China rarely enforced a rule preventing churches from holding services for minors under the age of 18. Until recently, the updated religion regulations mainly affected unregistered churches. In July authorities began scrutinizing registered churches in Liaoning more strictly, including pressuring young adults over the age of 18 not to attend church services. Some churches reported also shutting down their college student services.

There were reports of government officials, companies, and education authorities compelling members of house churches and other Christians to sign documents renouncing their Christian faith and church membership.

In February many companies began requiring workers to sign a “no-faith commitment,” according to *Bitter Winter*. Between April and August, local security personnel approached nearly 300 members of Zion Church in Beijing and pressured members to sign a document renouncing their church membership as well as their Christian faith.

Radio Free Asia reported that in mid-September, the CCP took further steps to implement the ban on religious activity among government employees, including schoolteachers and medical personnel. According to local Christians, authorities were

asking teachers working in high schools in Zhejiang, Jiangxi, and Henan Provinces to sign a letter pledging to hold no religious beliefs. Christian believers said the crackdown on religious beliefs among teachers came alongside pressure on students, who are required to submit to an interview with school authorities if they declare religious beliefs on mandatory forms.

World Watch Monitor, an online news site reporting on Christianity, reported in April that teachers forced more than 300 Christian children in two high schools in Zhejiang Province to fill out a form stating they did not adhere to any religion. According to the report, the children were given a questionnaire about their faith and pressured to write they had no religion. Those who did not comply reportedly were denied access to opportunities at school and faced the potential threat of not receiving certificates of completion, which would make them unable to attend college.

In May ChinaAid reported education authorities in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, asked students to state the religious beliefs of their families. After identifying students whose parents were Catholic or another Christian denomination, authorities visited the parents in their homes to persuade them to give up their religious beliefs. Some authorities used the parents' employers to pressure parents to renounce their religious beliefs, including by withholding bonuses, according to the report.

According to pastors and a group that monitors religion in China, the government was ordering Christians to sign papers renouncing their faith. The *New York Post* reported in September that ChinaAid leadership released video footage of what appeared to be piles of burning Bibles and forms stating that signatories renounced their Christian faith. ChinaAid leadership said this marked the first time since the Cultural Revolution that Christians had been compelled to make such declarations, under the fear of expulsion from school and the loss of welfare benefits.

International media and NGOs reported on a nation-wide campaign to “Sinicize religion,” and the government restricted individuals' ability to express or practice their religion in other ways.

On March 28, in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, the government launched a five-year plan on promoting the “Sinicization of Christianity.” The plan outline advocated “incorporating the Chinese elements into church worship services, hymns and songs, clergy attire, and the architectural style of church buildings” and proposed to “retranslate the Bible or rewrite biblical commentaries.” The government's proposed plan to augment the content of the Bible in line with CCP policies fueled speculation in Christian groups that it was a reason the government began enforcing a ban on online Bible sales.

According to the *South China Morning Post*, cities throughout Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in north-central China reported efforts by authorities to replace Islamic structures and symbols with traditional Chinese iconography. Individuals in Yinchuan reported bright red lamps with Chinese cloud designs replacing gray lamp posts with Islamic motifs and two round flat rings in the style of Chinese jade discs replacing two large crescent moon sculptures. The local government banned Arab-style mosques and set out plans to convert existing mosques to resemble Chinese temples.

Radio Free Asia reported in August that state-sanctioned religious associations had proposed a measure that would require all places of worship to fly the national flag. Representatives at a conference in Beijing indicated that the national flag should be raised at religious venues during national holidays and during each religion’s important festivals and celebrations. The measure also indicated that otherwise officials would place scrutiny on the places of worship.

Authorities reportedly pressured churches to display banners with political ideology, recite the national anthem before singing Christian hymns, and engage in other acts demonstrating one’s loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party over the church.

ChinaAid reported that in early July, more than 100 churches in Xinyu County, Jiangxi Province, received a warning from local authorities demanding they dismantle their crosses and replace them with an image of President Xi Jinping or the national flag. Reportedly, government agents destroyed the crosses of churches that refused to dismantle their crosses.

In September Pastor Zhang Liang reported authorities in Shangqiu, Henan Province, had begun requiring churches to flank the cross with a photograph of Chairman Mao Zedong on one side and President Xi Jinping on the other.

According to *Bitter Winter*, on November 1, authorities in Luoning County, Henan Province ordered a government-approved TSPM church to remove one of the Ten Commandments from a sign displayed on its wall. Authorities said President Xi Jinping opposed the commandment “You shall have no other gods before me,” and they wiped it off from the display. Prior to this incident, media reported in August government officials had forcibly dismantled the church’s cross.

In 2017, the Ningxia government initiated a campaign to remove Arabic translations from street signs, and by February 2018, Arabic logos for halal restaurants and butcher shops were removed and replaced by Chinese characters and pinyin. In Tongxin, Hui County, Ningxia, the article stated the government barred party members from going to mosques for daily prayers or taking part in the Hajj, even after they retired from office. Authorities also banned government workers from wearing white caps to work. In Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia, authorities banned calls to prayer on the grounds of noise pollution. Government officials ordered the Quran and books on Islam removed from souvenir shops and ordered mosques to cancel public Arabic-language courses.

Bitter Winter reported that authorities told Buddhist temple leaders in Xinmi, Henan Province, they had to take down banners and lock their doors because this was CCP Central Party Committee policy. Authorities painted over the names of CCP members who had donated to the temples and whose names were displayed on the donors’ recognition steles. According to the report, villagers said they saw the defacing of the donors’ steles as the coming of another Cultural Revolution.

According to media reports, at least four cities and one province ordered restrictions on Christmas celebrations including bans on Christmas decorations, promotional activities in shops, Christmas-themed events, and public performances. Authorities also

increased law enforcement and patrols in the days leading up to December 25 to prevent any illegal Christmas celebrations. Police in Kunming issued a notice prohibiting Christmas decorations and related activities in crowded places such as hotels, karaoke parlors, internet cafes, and bars. The notice said, “It is forbidden to hang Christmas stockings, wear Christmas hats, and place Christmas trees, and so on.”

Officials sent a notice to churches in Zhoukou, Henan Province, requiring them to vet Christmas commemorations with the government, forbidding minors from participating in Christmas events, and limiting expenses to 2000 RMB (\$290). School administrators at a university in Shanghai canceled a student union’s Christmas celebration, and administrators warned students in Qingdao against celebrating Christmas.

According to a brief statement released on August 28 by the National People’s Congress, the country’s new revised civil code would no longer retain the relevant content of family planning, which could scrap birth restrictions altogether. The revised code, however, will not be completed until March 2020, and there is no indication yet how exactly the change would be made, or whether any other restrictions or conditions might remain on Chinese families.

In December state-run media outlet the *Global Times* reported that the Gansu provincial market regulation bureau banned four provincial halal certifications for food, restaurants, dairy, and noodles. The article cited an official at the Gansu Ethnic Affairs Commission who stated that one region and five provinces (Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai, Shaanxi, Henan, Yunnan, and Tianjin Provinces) would also restrict the use of halal certifications on various products. The Ethnic Affairs Commission employee stated the province was restricting these standards in line with the CCP’s United Front Work Department requirement to “fight the pan-halal tendency.”

Hui Muslims in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan Provinces continued to engage in religious practice with less government interference than did Uighurs, according to local sources. Hui Muslims reported they were free to practice as they wished with regard to family customs such as fasting during Ramadan, clothing, prayer, and performing the Hajj. They reported, however, they did not receive special accommodations for time to pray during their workday and were not given time off for Islamic holidays.

In August the government of Hubei Province issued new regulations on the commercialization of the Buddhist and Daoist religions stating all activities of any religion must be confined to the private sphere and strictly prohibiting religious iconography in the public sphere.

Authorities increased social media and other surveillance on religious groups. According to *Bitter Winter*, church leaders in Hebei and Henan Provinces had begun warning their church members that their social media accounts were under surveillance and cautioned them not to transmit religious content.

Christian organizations seeking to use social media and smartphone applications to distribute Christian materials reported the government increased censorship of these materials.

In July Radio Free Asia reported authorities in Malho, Qinghai Province, tightened controls on social media and deployed large numbers of armed police to Tibetan villages to discourage celebrations of the July 6 birthday of the Dalai Lama. Authorities warned managers of social media chat groups to restrict sharing any secret or internal information by Tibetans and to keep an eye out for attempts to organize celebrations of the spiritual leader.

The Wall Street Journal reported in July that the IAC required Chinese Muslims departing for Mecca in Saudi Arabia to wear customized smart cards with personal data and a GPS tracker.

In September Pastor Zhang Liang reported the Chinese government had tightened its control over his church’s operations in Shangqiu, Henan Province. Zhang said the government was installing “information officers” to report on “antigovernment” activities and behavior seen as a threat to social stability.

In April Beijing authorities ordered an unregistered church, Zion Church, to install 24 closed-circuit surveillance cameras inside the church, according to *Reuters*. After church leadership refused this order, police and security personnel harassed and threatened church members and ultimately forced the eviction of the church. In November the State Security Bureau installed surveillance equipment including multiple surveillance cameras inside an officially registered Protestant church in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, including in washrooms, according to *Bitter Winter*.

Authorities continued to restrict the printing and distribution of the Bible and other religious literature, and government prepared regulations to extended control of online postings by religious groups.

The government limited distribution of Bibles to CCPA and TSPM/Chinese Christian Council entities such as churches, church bookshops inside churches, and seminaries. Individuals could not order Bibles directly from publishing houses. Members of unregistered churches reported the supply and distribution of Bibles was inadequate, particularly in rural locations. There were approximately 11 provincial TSPM Christian publishers. Authorities only allowed the national TSPM and CCPA to publish the Bible legally. According to reports, while there were no independent domestic Christian booksellers, publishers without a religious affiliation could publish Christian books. Approximately 20 distribution centers and bookstores were linked to the national TSPM. In addition, authorities reportedly allowed churches with more than 2,000 members to sell books at their church facilities. Approximately 700 churches had such bookstores. During the year, authorities continued to limit the number of Christian titles that could be published annually, with draft manuscripts closely reviewed. Authorities also restricted the ability of some bookstores to sell Christian books.

While only government-sanctioned bodies that oversee Christian churches were officially able to sell the Bible, a *South China Morning Post* article reported that authorities had tended to look the other way. The article also reported that on several visits in April Ministry of Culture inspectors told the Christian bookstores they could no longer sell “foreign books.”

Radio Free Asia reported that starting April 2, online selling platforms Taobao, JD.com, and Dangdang banned the sale of Bibles without international standard book numbers (ISBNs) and related spiritual books, according to a Taobao seller. A *New York Times* article said the government banned online retailers from selling the Bible, and on leading online stores, internet searches for the Bible came up empty. The article also reported that Christianity was the only major religion in China whose major holy text “cannot be sold through normal commercial channels.” As of the end of the year, at least one dual-language (English and Chinese) Bible and two foreign-published English language Bibles were sold on some online sites. Bibles in Chinese only were still unavailable for online purchase, however.

Bitter Winter reported that in Anshan Prefecture, Liaoning Province, police imposed a 400,000 RMB (\$58,200) fine on any church discovered with an “unofficial” version of the Bible. Faced with these pressures, underground churches reported gathering far less frequently and breaking up into small groups that moved around and held services at different locations.

The government continued to allow some foreign educational institutions to provide religious materials in Chinese, which are used by both registered and unregistered religious groups.

In September the Associated Press reported the government posted draft rules regulating religious activity on the internet that would impose tight limits on what could be said or posted, including a ban on criticizing official religious policies and promoting religion among minors. The draft regulations would require anyone wishing to provide religious instruction or similar services online to apply by name and have authorities deem them morally fit and politically reliable. They also would prohibit livestreaming of religious activities, including praying, preaching, or burning incense.

According to *Bitter Winter*, the draft rules regulating religious activity on the internet would force churches to obtain licenses so the Chinese government could control what religious information is posted online.

The government continued limitations on religious education.

The *South China Morning Post* reported in January education officials from the local government in Guanghe County, a largely Hui Muslim area in Gansu Province, banned children from taking part in religious education during the Lunar New Year break. Officials did not allow children to attend religious events, read scripture in classes, or enter religious venues during the holiday, and instructed teachers and students to “strengthen political ideology and propaganda.” Officials also implemented similar restrictions in Linxia, the capital city of the Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province.

Starting in April authorities reportedly pressured churches to prevent children under 18 years old from attending services or otherwise studying the Bible. Local government departments of religious affairs in Henan, Shandong, and Anhui Provinces released public letters announcing juveniles could not enter religious venues or attend religious

education activities. One announcement in Xinxiang City, Henan Province stated the purpose of these measures was to ensure minors do not believe in religion, enter religious places, participate in religious activities, or participate in religious training classes. The same message was delivered in other locations. AsiaNews reported in April a joint notice from the Henan Catholic Patriotic Association and the Henan Commission for Church Affairs required the religious bodies to adhere to the principle of “separating religion from education,” and in particular prohibit religious associations from organizing activities of any type to disseminate religious education to minors and effectively prohibit minors from attending church.

In August Open Doors USA, a Christian nonprofit organization, reported that in Shangrao, Jiangxi Province, more than 40 churches hung slogans that said “Non-locals are prohibited from preaching; no underage people allowed in church.”

Radio Free Asia reported that on October 25, state security agents prevented more than 100 Protestants from unrecognized churches from traveling to a religious training event in South Korea hosted by a U.S. church. Saying the participants would “likely damage national security,” airport police in Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong issued travel bans on the conference participants.

Radio Free Asia reported in July that authorities in Dzachuka, a Tibetan-populated region of Sichuan Province, forced Buddhist monks aged 15 and younger to leave their monasteries and placed them in government-run schools. Authorities strictly limited the number of monks and nuns enrolled at the monasteries and forced those remaining to take part in classes promoting loyalty to the country and the ruling CCP.

On April 16, approximately 20 officials from Fujian Province’s Xiamen Education Bureau and the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau conducted a surprise inspection, without warrants, of a kindergarten operated by a local, unregistered house church. Authorities said the kindergarten operation was illegal. Authorities reportedly tried to confiscate religious teaching materials and shut down the school, but faculty members and parents prevented them from doing so.

On June 20, Liang Liuning, Deputy Director General of the Guangxi Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission, held two lectures for more than 100 Islamic clerics and administrators on the essence of the 19th Party Congress and the implementation of the revised Regulations on Religious Affairs.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning had to obtain the support of the corresponding official “patriotic religious association.” The government continued to require students to demonstrate “political reliability,” and political issues were included in examinations of graduates from religious schools. Both registered and unregistered religious groups reported a shortage of trained clergy due in part to government controls on admission to seminaries.

The government reportedly discriminated in employment against members of religious groups it identified as “cults” and others and prevented employees from participating in religious activities.

In February the Guiyang-based Yunnan District People’s Court specified in its recruitment notice for judicial assistants that individuals who previously participated in “illegal religious activities” or “cult-organized activities” could not apply for the position.

On February 18, formerly jailed Jiangmen house church clergyman Ruan Haonan said it was almost impossible for a blacklisted “cult” member to find a decent job. Ruan was a chef before he worked full time at a house church in Heshan City. He said authorities warned each employer Ruan contacted, and as a result, no employer dared offer him a job. Heshan police arrested Ruan on June 12, 2017, for sabotaging law enforcement by utilizing and organizing “heretic cult organizations” and released him on bail with restricted movement in July 2017. ChinaAid reported that while on bail, authorities required Ruan to report to the Public Security Bureau every three months and to obtain permission before traveling.

According to sources, individuals with Christian affiliations in Northeast China faced difficulties with career enhancement or government employment. Government officials or employees tied to state-affiliated organizations often attempted to hide their religious beliefs to avoid discrimination. The sources said it was one reason some believers choose to attend unregistered rather than official churches.

Healthcare professionals were required to discover, stop, and report violations of law regarding religion, including among family, friends, and neighbors, according to a letter issued to staff at the Yueqing Maternal and Child Health Hospital in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province. Any staff organizing or participating in religious activities in the hospital could be fired. Staff were banned from wearing any clothing linked to a religious belief. Staff were also considered to have committed a violation if they did not adhere to the pledge not to follow any religion or participate in religious activities. The hospital’s letter stated violations of this policy would lead to “education.” Hospitals in Xinyu, Jiangxi Province, posted banners and notices against religious beliefs as well.

Authorities took other actions against “cults.” On March 17, Guangzhou’s Huadu District Political and Law Commission hosted an anticult organization event in Hongshan Village for local students. After the event, many students vowed to stay away from any “cult” organization and signed their names on the anticult signature wall.

In April Fujian Province’s Zhangpu County Government and Zhangzhou Justice Department redesigned a local public park giving it an anticult theme to promote the results of the 19th Party Congress and related anticult laws and raise awareness of the influence of “cults.”

On April 24, the Foshan Municipal CCP Political and Legal Commission, the Guangdong University of Finance and Economics' Shanshui Campus (Foshan), and the Guangdong Legal Studies Institute Shanshui Campus jointly launched an anticult campaign highlighting the influence of “cults” on state security, social developments, and family lives.

On February 24, the Guangdong Provincial Anti-Heretic Cult Association posted a letter drafted by former Guangzhou Falun Gong member Zhang Zhiming denouncing Falun Gong as a “cult organization” that had jeopardized his work and ruined his family life.

In September Jiangxi Province's commission on religious affairs published an article indicating changes to the basic nature of religious control in the province. The article stated all religious activities should be “amiable and gentle” and that they should contribute to the unity of the people.

On November 29, *The Telegraph* reported that local authorities in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region had signed a “cooperation antiterrorism agreement” with Xinjiang officials to “learn from the latter's experiences in promoting social stability.” As part of these efforts, the Communist Party head of Ningxia, Zhang Yunsheng, went to Xinjiang to learn about combatting terrorism and managing religious affairs. According to a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch, there was a growing fear among Chinese that the Xinjiang model could spread across the country and have grave consequences for religious freedom.

Government policy continued to allow religious groups to engage in charitable work. Regulations specifically prohibited faith-based organizations from proselytizing while conducting charitable activities. Authorities required faith-based charities, like all other charitable groups, to register with the government. Once registered as an official charity, authorities allowed them to raise funds publicly and to receive tax benefits. The government did not permit unregistered charitable groups to raise funds openly, hire employees, open bank accounts, or own property. According to several unregistered religious groups, the government required faith-based charities to obtain official cosponsorship of the registration application by the local official religious affairs bureau. Authorities often required these groups to affiliate with one of the five “patriotic religious associations.”

The government continued its efforts to restrict the movement of the Dalai Lama. After the Dalai Lama visited Sweden in September, *Global Times* reported the government consistently firmly opposed the decision of any country to allow such a visit, adding “... some countries still turn a deaf ear, taking chances to challenge China's bottom line.”

In October ChinaAid reported that since the second week of September, a CCP-backed militant group, United Wa State Army, had arrested more than 200 Christian pastors and missionaries in territory the group controls in Shan State, Burma, according to Lahu Baptist Church, a local church in Burma. At least 100 were released after guards forced prisoners to sign a pledge they would pray only at home, rather than at churches. According to the report, many observers believed close ties between United Wa State Army and China fueled these actions.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Because the government and individuals closely link religion, culture, and ethnicity, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity. The Council on Foreign Relations reported religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims, experienced institutionalized discrimination throughout the country because of both their religious beliefs and their status as ethnic minorities with distinct languages and cultures.

Anti-Muslim speech in social media remained widespread, despite the government’s announcement in September 2017 that it would censor some anti-Muslim expression on the internet.

In some online forums, anti-Muslim speech regarding the Hui Muslims in Shadian, Yunnan Province persisted. Some individuals said imams in Shadian colluded with Rohingya Muslims from Burma on drug use and drug trafficking in Shadian. Other criticisms in these online forums include labelling the imams in Shadian as radicals for encouraging Hui Muslims in the city to marry Rohingya individuals and not to send their children to school.

Despite labor law provisions against discrimination in hiring based on religious belief, some employers openly discriminated against religious believers. Some Protestant Christians reported employers terminated their employment due to their religious activities. There were also reports from Falun Gong practitioners that employers dismissed them for practicing Falun Gong. In some instances, landlords discriminated against potential or current tenants based on their religious beliefs. Falun Gong practitioners reported having a very difficult time finding landlords who would rent them apartments. Following government crackdowns in May and December, members of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, reported local authorities pressured their landlords to evict them due to their affiliation with the unregistered church. The members also said their universities and employers received pressure from the local authorities to expel them from the schools or terminate their employment.

The Guardian reported Uighurs faced difficulty in finding accommodation because local hotels frequently told Uighur visitors no rooms were available. One individual, who was initially mistaken as a foreigner, said hotel staff denied him entry to a hotel after they saw the word Uighur on his Chinese identification card. Hotels are required to report on guests to local police authorities, and hoteliers could face punishment for hosting Uighurs.

On April 19, the son of a pastor from the Shenzhen-based Canaan House Church in Guangdong Province said the church’s landlord relented to authorities’ pressure to terminate the lease and cut off the church’s electrical supply. The pastor’s son said the church faced “constant persecution” after unidentified people repeatedly harassed the church, broke into the church’s property, and requested members leave the building for what authorities said were safety or fire hazards.

On July 5, a Uighur woman in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province reportedly posted a letter online addressed to Shenzhen Party Secretary Wang Weizhong complaining about the frustrating restrictions she experienced as an ethnic minority in finding a rental apartment. The Uighur woman identified herself as a CCP member holding a senior management position in a big company in Shenzhen. After receiving discouraging messages from the local community, several landlords broke her rental contracts. Local officials told the woman they required her landlord and her to report in person each week to the police, which she said no landlord wanted to do. The woman was staying in a colleague's apartment at year's end.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Vice President, Secretary of State, Ambassador, and other embassy and consulates general representatives repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about abuses of religious freedom. The Vice President, Secretary of State, Deputy Secretary of State, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and the Ambassador for International Religious Freedom met with survivors of religious persecution or their family members, from the Uighur Muslim, Tibetan Buddhist, and Protestant communities at the July Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington. At the ministerial, the Vice President said, “religious persecution is growing in both scope and scale in the world's most populous country, the People's Republic of China....together with other religious minorities, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians are often under attack.” On September 21, the Secretary of State said, “Hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of Uighurs are held against their will in so-called reeducation camps where they're forced to endure severe political indoctrination and other awful abuses. Their religious beliefs are decimated. And we're concerned too about the intense new government crackdown on Christians in China, which includes heinous actions like closing churches, burning Bibles, and ordering followers to sign papers renouncing their faith.”

At the ministerial the United States, Canada, Kosovo, and the United Kingdom issued a statement that said, “As representatives of the international community, we are deeply concerned about the significant restrictions on religious freedom in China and call on the Chinese government to respect the human rights of all individuals. Many members of religious minority groups in China – including Uighurs, Hui, and Kazakh Muslims; Tibetan Buddhists; Catholics; Protestants; and Falun Gong – face severe repression and discrimination because of their beliefs. These communities consistently report incidents, in which the authorities allegedly torture, physically abuse, arbitrarily arrest, detain, sentence to prison, or harass adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and peaceful practices.”

Embassy officials met regularly with a range of government officials managing religious affairs, both to advocate for greater religious freedom and tolerance and to obtain more information on government policy on the management of religious affairs.

Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, urged government officials at the central and local levels, including those at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Council, to implement stronger protections for religious freedom and release prisoners of

conscience. The Ambassador highlighted religious freedom in private diplomacy with senior officials. The Department of State, embassy, and consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience, including individuals imprisoned for religious reasons.

The Ambassador, Consuls General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Wuhan, and other embassy and consulate general officials met with religious groups as well as academics, NGOs, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, and family members of religious prisoners to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. For example, while in Yunnan Province, the Ambassador visited two long-standing Christian churches in areas heavily populated by religious minorities, meeting with local clergy members. The Consul General similarly met with Muslim and Christian leaders in Yunnan Province. Embassy and consulate general officials hosted events around religious holidays and conducted roundtable discussions with religious leaders to convey the importance of religious pluralism in society and learn about issues facing religious communities. The embassy arranged for the introduction of religious officials to members of U.S. religious communities and U.S. government agencies that engaged with those communities.

Throughout the year, the embassy and consulates general reached large local audiences with messages promoting respect, understanding, and tolerance for religious diversity. Through a series of lectures by academics and government officials, the embassy and consulates general discussed with audiences a number of religious freedom topics. In January an embassy-sponsored visitor discussed with a Beijing audience the role religious organizations played in shaping public and private institutions in the United States. Also in January a consulate general officer led a discussion in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, about the U.S. Muslim community, addressing questions about religious conflict, highlighting the connection between freedom of religion and free speech, and sparking a debate about the extent to which a diverse society must exercise tolerance toward minorities. In May an official at the Consulate General in Shenyang provided a historical perspective on major U.S. religions, detailed the constitution’s protection of religious expression, and led the audience in a discussion that included comments about rule of law, civil rights, and racial equality. In June the embassy held a discussion about the evolving interaction between the gay community and religious communities in the United States, with a focus on the interaction of religious groups and social change. Later in June an officer of the Consulate General in Shanghai explained recent U.S. legal cases involving freedom of religion, and facilitated audience discussion of the contours of proper legal protections for religious groups. The embassy hosted a presentation in July by a film director about her documentary portraying attempts by Muslims to increase gender equality within their community. The director engaged an audience of hundreds in a discussion about the value of equality and tolerance within and across religious traditions. That same month, an officer at the Consulate General in Guangzhou presented research on religion in politics, including the historical role of religious congregations in political activism.

The embassy amplified Department of State religious freedom initiatives directly to Chinese citizens through postings to the embassy website and to Weibo, WeChat, and Twitter accounts. A series of six posts about the July Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom garnered over six million views on these social media accounts, and 46,141 direct engagements by netizens. A set of four posts regarding the 2017 International Religious Freedom Report received 1.4 million views. The embassy social media team shared religious holiday greetings from the President, Secretary of State, and Ambassador. This included well wishes on the occasion of special religious days for Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Tibetan Buddhists. Millions of local citizens viewed these holiday messages, and the messages often sparking further comments and questions, such as, “A great country must have a broad mind!,” “Society has reached the point where one is not even allowed to read the Bible,” and “How do you protect the religious freedom of atheists?” Over the course of the year, the embassy and the consulates general regularly addressed questions of religious tolerance raised by some of the millions of online followers, offering them uniquely U.S. perspectives on religious freedom and tolerance.

Authorities continually harassed and intimidated religious leaders to dissuade them from speaking with U.S. officials. Authorities interrupted a meeting between the abbot of a prominent Tibetan Buddhist monastery and the Chengdu Consul General, quickly removing the abbot from the scene. Authorities regularly prevented members of religious communities from attending events at the embassy and consulates general, and security services questioned individuals who did attend. For example, in Guiyang, Guizhou Province, officials followed and harassed a prominent pastor and his family after he met with the Consul General from Chengdu. On at least three occasions during the year security officials threatened Tibetan Buddhist leaders and forced them to cancel meetings with high-level U.S. government visitors to southwest China at the last minute. In one instance, in April they interrogated a Tibetan Buddhist abbot and delayed his return to his home monastery in another province after authorities learned about his meeting with the Deputy Chief of Mission.

On December 11, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom said “the treatment of Muslims, Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners over a long period were reasons to keep China as a Country of Particular Concern.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On November 28, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

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