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Over the past year, USCIRF has monitored religious freedom conditions in Kyrgyzstan. Although the Kyrgyz constitution provides for religious freedom for all citizens, the Kyrgyz government restricts the registration of some religious groups and the activities of Muslim and other groups it considered threats to security. Over 80 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population is Sunni Muslim, with some 1,000 Shi'a; 15 percent is Christian, mostly Russian Orthodox, and an estimated 11,000 Protestants and a small number of Catholics; Jews, Buddhists and Baha'is are estimated at about 1,000 each.

Problematic religion law

Kyrgyzstan's 2008 religion law prohibits the distribution of religious materials in public places, apartments, private houses, schools and universities. The Kyrgyz religion law also imposes complex and burdensome registration requirements for religious organizations, including having 200 resident citizen founders and at least 10 members, of whom at least one must have been in Kyrgyzstan for 15 years.

Registration issues

In 2013, after they changed to their charters and names, the Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Orthodox Church faced difficulties re-registering. Additionally, according to a September 2013 report by the Kyrgyz NGO Open Viewpoint, nine "non-traditional" religious organizations were denied local registration by the Bishkek City Council, including Evangelical Protestant, Seventh-Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, Roman Catholic, and Jewish groups. An effort to ban the Unification Church as extremist was overturned by the Kyrgyz Supreme Court in 2013. In 2012, the government refused to re-register the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, based on purported "expert" advice which also served as the basis for a court ruling finding the Ahmadiyya community extremist and terrorist. After the reporting period, a Bishkek court on March 14, 2014 banned the religious movement *Akromiya* on the grounds that it is an extremist organization.

Lists of prohibited religious organizations reportedly are coordinated with the decisions of intergovernmental regional security organizations, in particular, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Possible increase in regulation

In early February 2014, President Almazbek Atambayev reportedly chaired a government meeting to discuss increasing state regulation of the religious sphere, according to Forum 18 News Service. Participants included the new acting head of the state-backed Muslim Board, the new head of the State Commission for Religious Affairs, and officials from the National Security Committee, secret police, law enforcement agencies, Presidential Administration, and Parliament. After the meeting, a Presidential decree was issued announcing increased official control of the Muslim Board and the drafting of legal amendments that may further restrict freedom of religion. USCIRF will continue to monitor these developments.

Recommendations

USCIRF recommends that the U.S. government should urge Kyrgyzstan to seek expert advice from relevant OSCE entities concerning any draft legislation pertaining to freedom of religion or belief, and should publicly raise Kyrgyzstan's religious freedom violations at appropriate international fora, such as the OSCE and the UN.

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