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China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau)

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

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

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

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for many unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. Unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference and harassment. Members of some unregistered religious groups, including Protestant and Catholic groups, were subjected to restrictions, including intimidation, harassment, and detention. In some localities, "underground" religious leaders reported ongoing pressure to register with the State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA) or its provincial and local offices, known as Religious Affairs Bureaus (RAB). Some unregistered religious groups also reported facing pressure to be affiliated with and supervised by official government-sanctioned religious associations linked to the five main religions--Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

The extent of religious freedom varied widely within the country. For example, officials in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) tightly controlled religious activity, while Muslims elsewhere in the country enjoyed greater religious freedom. Treatment of unregistered groups also varied regionally. For example, some local officials in Henan Province often mistreated unregistered Protestants, and some local officials in Hebei Province tightly controlled Catholics loyal to the Vatican. In other localities, however, officials worked closely with registered and unregistered Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant groups to accomplish religious and social goals.

Government officials continued to scrutinize closely contacts between citizens and foreigners involved in religion. The Government detained some citizens for providing religious information to foreigners and prevented some religious figures from traveling abroad. Among them was Henan Province Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang, whom authorities detained on December 1, 2004. However, many religious adherents reported that they were able to practice their faith openly in officially registered places of worship without interference from authorities. Official sources, religious professionals, and persons who attend services at both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the number of believers in the country continued to grow.

The Government passed new regulations on religious affairs, which took effect on March 1, 2005. The regulations are an attempt to bring regulatory activities governing religious affairs within a legal framework. The regulations made no reference to five official religions. Some saw the new regulations as reflecting a more tolerant atmosphere and establishing legally protected rights for religious groups to engage in activities such as publishing, education, and social work. Others criticized the regulations as merely codifying past practice and questioned whether they would enhance religious freedom.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman explicitly stated at a March 15 press conference that the country has no restrictions against minors receiving religious education. In many areas of the country, children were able to participate in religious life with their parents, but local officials in some areas forbade children from full religious participation. For example, local officials in Xinjiang stated that persons younger than 18 are forbidden from entering mosques and from receiving religious education.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it categorized as "cults" in general and of small Christian-based groups and the Falun Gong in particular. Arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued, and there have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse.

Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons, reeducation-through-labor camps, and extra-judicial "legal education" centers. Falun Gong adherents engaged in few public activities within China during the period covered by this report, perhaps due to the strength of the Government's campaign against the group. However, there were continuing revelations about the extra-legal activities of the Government's "610 office," implicated in most alleged abuses of Falun Gong practitioners.

Some social tension exists between religious believers and non-believers. Religious communities generally coexist without significant friction.

The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country, using both focused external pressure on abuses and support for positive trends within the country. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with Government leaders, including in his November 2004 meeting with President Hu Jintao at the APEC summit. Secretary Rice discussed religious freedom and attended a church service during her March 2005 visit to Beijing. Senior U.S. officials called on the Government to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and to respect religious freedom. Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. In Washington and in Beijing, in public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect citizens' constitutional and internationally recognized rights to exercise religious freedom and to release all those serving sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested the imprisonment of and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 3.5 million square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2005 Government White Paper, there are "more than 100 million religious adherents," representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. According to this official publication, the country has more than 85,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, and more than 3,000 religious organizations. These same official statistics have been used unchanged since 1997, when the State Council Information Office published a White Paper on Freedom of Religious Belief. Given the growth in religion since 1997, unpublished estimates suggest the country has over 200 million believers and 100,000 sites for religious activities.

The country has five main religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. While these are the primary religions, the 2005 religious affairs regulations no longer identify "official" religions. The Russian Orthodox Church also operates in some regions and other religions exist in the country's expatriate community. Most of the country's population does not formally practice any religion. Approximately 8 percent of the population is Buddhist, approximately 1.5 percent is Muslim, an estimated 0.4 percent belongs to the official Catholic Church, an estimated 0.4 to 0.6 percent belongs to the unofficial Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church, an estimated 1.2 to 1.5 percent is registered as Protestant, and perhaps 2.5 percent worships in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control.

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

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

The Government estimates that there are more than 100 million Buddhists, making Buddhism the organized religion with the largest body of followers. However, it is difficult to estimate accurately the number of Buddhists because they do not have congregational memberships and often do not participate in public ceremonies. The Government reports that there are 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries and more than 200,000 nuns and monks. Most believers, including most ethnic Han Buddhists, practice Mahayana Buddhism. Most Tibetans and ethnic Mongolians practice Tibetan Buddhism, a Mahayana adaptation. Some ethnic minorities in southwest Yunnan Province practice Theravada Buddhism, the dominant tradition in neighboring Southeast Asia.

According to government figures, there are 20 million Muslims, more than 40,000 Islamic places of worship (more than half of which are in Xinjiang), and more than 45,000 imams nationwide. The country has 10 predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Hui, estimated to number nearly 10 million. Hui are centered in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, but there are significant concentrations of Hui throughout the country, including in Gansu, Henan, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Hebei Provinces and in Xinjiang. Hui slightly outnumber Uighur Muslims, who live primarily in Xinjiang. According to an official 2005 report, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region had 23,788 mosques and 26,000 clerics at the end of 2003, but observers noted that fewer than half of the mosques were authorized to hold Friday prayer and holiday

services. The country also has over 1 million Kazakh Muslims and thousands of Dongxiang, Kyrgyz, Salar, Tajik, Uzbek, Baoan, and Tatar Muslims.

The unofficial, Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church claims a membership larger than the 5 million persons registered with the official Catholic Church. Precise figures are impossible to determine, but Vatican officials have estimated that the country has as many as 10 million Catholics in both the official and unofficial churches. Chinese Catholic sources put the total number at approximately 8 million. According to official figures, the government-approved Catholic Church has 67 bishops, 5,000 priests and nuns, and more than 6,000 churches and meetinghouses. There are thought to be more than 40 bishops operating "underground," some of whom are likely in prison or under house arrest.

The Government maintains that the country has more than 16 million Protestants, more than 55,000 registered churches and other places of worship, and 18 theological schools. Protestant church officials have estimated that at least 20 million Chinese worship in official churches. Foreign and local academics put the number of Protestants between 30 and 100 million. A 2004 non-governmental survey in Beijing tallied over 100,000 unregistered Protestants, far more than the 30,000 registered with authorities. Domestic and foreign experts agree that the number of Protestants is growing rapidly. According to state-run media reports in August 2004, the number of Protestants is increasing by up to 600,000 annually.

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

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

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

On November 30, 2004, Premier Wen Jiabao signed new religious affairs regulations, which became effective on March 1, 2005. The new regulations replace previous 1994 regulations governing religious sites (although 1994 regulations governing religious activities by foreigners remain in effect). The regulations bring regulatory practices governing religious affairs within a legal framework and into compliance with China's Administrative Licensing Law.

Unlike the 1994 regulations, the new regulations protect the rights of registered religious groups, under certain conditions, to possess property, publish literature, train and approve clergy, and collect donations. Some commentators said the new regulations could create opportunities for other faiths and previously unregistered groups to expand their presence in China because the regulations no longer classify the five main religions as "official" religions. Critics said the new regulations merely codify past practices and give authorities broad discretion to define which religious activities are permissible.

Like the 1994 law, the new regulations require religious groups to register places of worship. Spiritual activities in places of worship that have not registered may be considered illegal and participants can be punished. There are five requirements for the registration of "sites for religious activities": First,

establishment of the site must be consistent with the overall purpose of the religious affairs regulations and must not be used to "disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the state" and must not be "subject to any foreign domination." Second, local religious citizens must have a need to carry out collective religious activities frequently. Third, there must be religious personnel qualified to preside over the activities. Fourth, the site must have "necessary funds." Fifth, the site must be "rationally located" so as not to interfere with normal production and neighboring residents. Government officials claim that registration requirements are simple and places of worship are not required to affiliate with one of the five official "patriotic" religious organizations that correspond to the five main faiths.

Under the new regulations clergy need not be approved by the Government, but must be reported to the Government after being selected pursuant to the rules of the relevant religious association.

Prior to the new regulations, nearly all local RAB officials require Protestant churches to affiliate with the (Protestant) Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC). Credentialing procedures effectively required clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC, a practice which so far appeared unchanged since adoption of the new regulations. Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refuse to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC. Some groups disagree with the TSPM/CCC teachings that all Protestant beliefs are compatible and that differences between Protestant denominations are irrelevant. In a few regions, Protestant groups have registered without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. These exceptions include the Local Assemblies Protestant churches in Zhejiang Province, where no significant TSPM/CCC community exists, and the (Korean) Chaoyang Church in Jilin Province, both of which operate openly without affiliating with the TSPM/CCC. Additionally, the (Russian) Orthodox Church has been able to operate without affiliating with a government organization in a few parts of the country. In other regions, officially "post-denominational" Protestant churches informally aligned themselves with Protestant denominations. Some pastors in official churches said that denominational affiliation was an important way of drawing parishioners.

Some groups register voluntarily, some register under pressure, and the authorities refuse to register others. Some religious groups have declined to register out of principled opposition to state control of religion. Others do not register due to fear of adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders. Unregistered groups also frequently refuse to register for fear that doing so would require theological compromises, curtail doctrinal freedom, or allow government authorities to control sermon content. Some groups claimed that authorities refused them registration without explanation or detained group members who met with officials to attempt to register. The Government contended that these refusals mainly were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities or failure to meet other legal requirements. At the end of the period covered by this report, it was too early to tell whether the new regulations would result in an increase in the number of or an expansion in the type of registered religious groups.

The Government has banned all groups that it has determined to be "cults," including the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church, the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), the Servants of Three Classes, the Association of Disciples, the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, the Family of Love, the South China Church, the Falun Gong, and the Zhong Gong movements. (Zhong Gong is a qigong exercise discipline with some mystical tenets.) After the revised Criminal Law came into effect in 1997, offenses related to membership in unapproved cults and religious groups were classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. A ban on cults, including the Falun Gong spiritual movement, was enacted in 1999. Under Article 300 of the Criminal Law, "cult" members who "disrupt public order" or distribute publications may be sentenced to from 3 to 7 years in prison, while "cult" leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to 7 years or more in prison.

Government sensitivity to Muslim communities varied widely. In some predominantly Muslim areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially in Xinjiang among the Uighurs, officials continued to restrict or tightly control religious expression and teaching. Police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused by the Government of supporting separatism. The Government permits, and in some cases subsidizes, Muslim citizens who make the Hajj to Mecca. In the first half of 2005, nearly 10,000 Chinese Muslims made the Hajj, half of them on government-organized delegations.

In past years, local officials destroyed several unregistered places of worship, although there were no reports of widespread razing of churches or shrines during the period covered by this report. The Government has restored or rebuilt churches, temples, mosques, and monasteries damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and allowed the reopening of some seminaries, although the pace and scope of restoration activity has varied from locality to locality. In 2003, for example, construction began in Beijing on the first new Protestant churches to be constructed in the capital since the People's Republic was founded in 1949. Although there is far greater interest in religion and a far greater number of religious adherents today, there are far fewer temples, churches, or mosques than existed 35 years ago, and many of those that exist are overcrowded and in poor condition.

In January 2005, the Government organized a national meeting on religion. The meeting addressed similar themes to a series of conferences on religion in January 2004 that advised officials to guard against Christian-influenced "cults" and avoid "foreign infiltration under cover of religion." In early 2005, five Government training sessions were held across the country for some 3,000 religious affairs officials to educate them about the new religious affairs regulations.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

Some local authorities continued a selective crackdown on unregistered religious groups, and the Central Government did not oppose this crackdown. Police closed unregistered mosques and temples, as well as some Catholic churches and Protestant "house churches," many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources, and networks. Several unregistered church leaders reported continuing pressure from local authorities. Despite these efforts at control, official sources, religious professionals, and members of both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the number of religious adherents in the country continued to grow.

The Government makes political demands on the clergy or leadership of registered groups. For example, authorities have required clergy to publicly endorse government policies or denounce Falun Gong. In other areas, including Xinjiang and the Tibetan Autonomous Region, authorities require clergy to participate in patriotic education. The Government continued its harsh repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement and of "cults" in general. As in past years, local authorities moved against houses of worship outside their control that grew too large or espoused beliefs considered threatening to "state security." Overall, the basic policy of permitting religious activity to take place relatively unfettered in government-approved sites and under government control remained unchanged.

Official tolerance for Buddhism and Taoism has been greater than that for Christianity, and these religions often face fewer restrictions. However, as these non-Western religions have grown rapidly in recent years, there were signs of greater government concern and new restrictions, especially on groups that blend tenets from a number of religious beliefs. The Government also sought to regulate closely the financial affairs of Buddhist and Taoist temples.

During the period covered by this report, government repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement continued. At the National People's Congress session in March 2004, Premier Wen Jiabao's Government Work Report emphasized that the Government would "expand and deepen its battle against cults," including Falun Gong. There were credible reports of torture and deaths in custody of Falun Gong practitioners.

The authorities also continued to oppose other groups considered "cults," such as the Xiang Gong, Guo Gong, and Zhong Gong qigong groups.

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

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

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

Local officials have great discretion in determining whether "house churches" violate regulations. The term "house church" is used to describe both unregistered churches and gatherings in homes or businesses of groups of Christians to conduct small, private worship services. SARA officials confirmed during the year that unregistered churches are illegal, but prayer meetings and Bible study groups held among friends and family in homes are legal and need not register. In some parts of the country, unregistered house churches with hundreds of members meet openly with the full knowledge of local authorities, who characterize the

meetings as informal gatherings to pray, sing, and study the Bible. In other areas, house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends are not permitted. House churches often encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups or with co-religionists overseas. Urban house churches are generally limited to meetings of a few dozen members or less, while meetings of unregistered Protestants in small cities and rural areas may number in the hundreds.

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

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

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

The Government's refusal to allow the government-authorized Patriotic Catholic Church to recognize the authority of the Papacy in many fundamental matters of faith and morals has led many Catholics to reject joining the Patriotic Catholic Church on the grounds that this denies one of the foundational tenets of their faith. Pressure by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association on underground Catholic bishops to join the official Church continued, and underground priests and bishops were often detained. In the past, authorities reorganized dioceses without consulting church leaders, but there have been no such reports recently.

The Government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See, and there is no Vatican representative on the Mainland. The Vatican's diplomatic recognition of Taiwan remained the primary obstacle to improved relations, Government officials said, although differences over selection of Bishops remained a significant area of dispute. After the death of Pope John Paul II, Government and religious officials made conciliatory statements but did not send a delegation to the Pope's funeral. Official Catholic churches were encouraged to hold Masses remembering Pope John Paul II, however, and tens of thousands of Chinese across the country took part. Official Catholic Churches welcomed Pope Benedict XVI, and his picture was displayed prominently in many official and unofficial Catholic venues across the country. The Government also minimized historical disputes with the Vatican, such as the canonization of saints on Chinese National Day in 2000.

Most bishops of the official Catholic Church have, in fact, been recognized by the Vatican either before or after their appointment by the Government. In a few cases, the bishop named by the government-affiliated church conflicted directly with the bishop recognized by the Vatican, a situation that contributed significantly to tension between the official and unofficial Catholic churches and to tension between the Vatican and the Government. There was friction between some bishops of the Patriotic Church who have been consecrated with secret Vatican approval (or who obtained such secret approval after their consecration) and others consecrated without such approval. Despite these tensions, a few priests in the official church publicly acknowledged during the period covered by this report that their appointment had been approved by the

Vatican. They suffered no punishment for this public stance, although the Government denied that the Vatican played any role in approving bishops.

There are large Muslim populations in many areas, but government sensitivity to these communities varied widely. Generally speaking, the country's Hui Muslims, who often live in Han Chinese communities throughout the country, have greater religious freedom than Turkic Muslims such as the Uighurs, who are concentrated in the western part of the country. In areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially among the Uighurs in Xinjiang, officials continued to restrict the building of mosques and the training of clergy and prohibited the teaching of Islam to children. In addition to the restrictions on practicing religion placed on party members and government officials throughout the country, in Xinjiang, Muslim teachers, professors, and university students are not allowed to attend mosque or practice religion openly. Female university students and professors are discouraged from wearing headscarves or skirts. Some ethnic Tajiks in Xinjiang cannot attend mosque until over age 30. However, in other areas, particularly in areas populated by the Hui ethnic group, there was substantial mosque construction and renovation and also apparent freedom to worship. After a series of violent incidents, including bombings attributed to Uighur separatists, beginning in 1997, police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused of supporting separatism in Xinjiang. Because the Xinjiang government regularly fails to distinguish carefully among those involved in peaceful activities in support of independence, "illegal" religious activities, and violent terrorism, it is often difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those seeking to worship, those peacefully seeking political goals, or those engaged in violence. Xinjiang provincial-level Communist party and government officials repeatedly called for stronger management of religious affairs and for the separation of religion from administrative matters.

Xinjiang officials told foreign observers that children under 18 are not permitted to attend religious services in mosques in Xinjiang. However, children were observed attending prayer services at mosques in Beijing and other parts of the country. Fundamentalist Muslim leaders received particularly harsh treatment. In 2000, the authorities began conducting monthly political study sessions for religious personnel; the program reportedly continued during the period covered by this report. In August 2004, scores of Uighur Muslims in Hotan District were detained on charges of engaging in "illegal religious activities." Because of government control of information coming from Xinjiang, such reports were difficult to confirm.

In a growing number of areas, the authorities have displayed increasing tolerance of religious practice by foreigners, provided their religious observance does not involve Chinese nationals. Weekly services of the foreign Jewish community in Beijing have been held uninterrupted since 1995, and High Holy Day observances have been allowed for more than 15 years. Both reform and Orthodox Jewish services were held weekly during the period covered by this report. The Shanghai Jewish community has received permission from authorities to hold services in a historic Shanghai synagogue. However, officials gave a former synagogue in Harbin to the Russian Orthodox community, causing some tension between the local Russian Orthodox and overseas Jewish groups. Expatriate members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) meet regularly in a number of cities. In 2003, the Church received permission to hold services in a Beijing facility reserved for its use.

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

Some foreign church organizations came under pressure to register with government authorities, and some foreign missionaries whose activities extended beyond the expatriate community were expelled or asked to leave the country. In 2003, the documentary film "The Cross" and the book "Jesus in Beijing" were banned by the Government.

The increase in the number of Christians in the country has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles. Bibles can be purchased at many bookstores and at most officially recognized churches. Many house church members buy their Bibles at such places without incident. A Bible is affordable for most Chinese. The supply of Bibles is adequate in most parts of the country, but members of underground churches complain that the supply and distribution of Bibles in some places, especially rural locations, is inadequate. Individuals cannot order Bibles directly from publishing houses, and house Christians report that purchase of large numbers of Bibles can bring unfavorable attention to the purchaser. Customs officials continued to monitor for the "smuggling" of Bibles and other religious materials into the country. There have been credible reports that the authorities sometimes confiscate Bibles in raids on house churches.

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

Senior government officials claim that the country has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. However, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Education noted after her 2003 visit that Chinese students lack basic internationally recognized rights to religious education. Moreover, some local officials, especially in Xinjiang, prevented children from attending worship services, and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than 18 from entering. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that Christian and Muslim children in Xinjiang were prevented from receiving religious education. In some Muslim areas, minors attend religious schools in addition to state-run schools. In some areas, large numbers of young persons attend religious services at both registered and unregistered places of worship.

There were at least 76 Government-recognized training institutions for clergy in the 5 main religions, including 54 Catholic and Protestant seminaries, 10 institutes to train imams and Islamic scholars, and dozens of institutes to train Buddhist monks. Students who attend these institutes must demonstrate "political reliability," and all graduates must pass an examination on their theological and political knowledge to qualify for the clergy. Official religious organizations also administered local Bible schools, monastery-run schools, and other types of training centers. The number of secular universities with a center for the study of theology doubled from 17 in 2002 to 34 in 2005.

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

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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

Offenses related to membership in unapproved religious groups are classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. According to the Law Yearbook of China, arrests for disturbing the social order or cheating by the use of superstition totaled 8,051 in 2003, down significantly from previous years. Most experts agree that the spike in detentions on these charges in 1999-2000 resulted from the Government's crackdown, begun in mid-1999, on Protestant house churches, the unofficial Roman Catholic Church, and spiritual groups labeled as "cults," such as the Falun Gong.

According to Falun Gong practitioners in the United States, since 1999 more than 100,000 practitioners have been detained for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhere to the teachings of Falun Gong, or refusing to criticize the organization or its founder. The organization reports that its members have been subject to excessive force, abuse, detention, and torture, and that some of its members, including children, have died in custody. For example, in 2003, Falun Gong practitioner Liu Chengjun died after reportedly being abused in custody in Jilin Province. Some foreign observers estimate that at least half of the 250,000 officially recorded inmates in the country's reeducation-through-labor camps are Falun Gong adherents. Falun Gong places the number even higher. Hundreds of Falun Gong adherents were also incarcerated in legal education centers, a form of administrative detention, upon completion of their reeducation-through-labor sentences. Government officials denied the existence of such "legal education" centers. According to the Falun Gong, hundreds of its practitioners have been confined to psychiatric institutions and forced to take medications or undergo electric shock treatment against their will.

In December 2004, a Beijing attorney sent an open letter to the National People's Congress highlighting legal abuses in cases involving Falun Gong. The letter focused on the April 2004 detention and subsequent administrative sentencing of Huang Wei of Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province. It described how Falun Gong cases are handled outside normal legal procedures by a special Ministry of Justice office, known as the 610 office. The letter alleged that mistreatment is typical of the ongoing campaign against Falun Gong. After the open letter was published, Huang's wife disappeared, and her whereabouts remain unknown. The asylum request of a Chinese diplomat and other former government officials allegedly involved in the Government's campaign against Falun Gong overseas brought additional scrutiny and negative attention to

the extra-legal activities of the 610 office, including allegations that it sought out Falun Gong practitioners abroad and forcibly returned them to the country.

In April 2004, dozens of members of the Three Grades of Servants Church, which the Government labels a "cult," were detained in Heilongjiang Province. Gu Xianggao, allegedly a church member, was beaten to death in a Heilongjiang Province security facility shortly after these detentions. Public security officials paid compensation to Gu's family.

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

Many religious leaders and adherents, including those in official churches, have been detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms. Local authorities also use an administrative process to punish members of unregistered religious groups. Citizens may be sentenced by a nonjudicial panel of police and local authorities to up to 3 years in reeducation-through-labor camps. Many religious detainees and prisoners were held in such facilities during the period covered by this report. For example, in May 2005, police reportedly detained the China Christian Council-certified pastor of a Linqian County, Anhui Province church and three of his practitioners. In the fall of 2004, local officials in Henan's Pingyin County raided an official church, detained its pastor, and removed all of its property, down to the chairs and pews.

Authorities continued to harass and detain "house" Christians, especially for attempting to meet in large groups, travel within and outside of China for such meetings, and otherwise hold peaceful religious assemblies. In December 2004, authorities detained Henan Province house Christian pastor Zhang Rongliang, who reportedly organized such meetings. The Government stated he was arrested allegedly for carrying false documents, but his whereabouts remained unknown. In November 2004, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that the arrest of house church historian Zhang Yinan in September 2003 in Henan Province constituted an unlawful arbitrary detention. Zhang remained in a Pindingshan County reeducation-through-labor camp, where he reportedly had been beaten. In September 2004, the Government detained Beijing-based house Christian pastor Cai Zhuohua and later charged him with operating an illegal business based on his work publishing underground Christian literature. Separately, the Government detained house Christian Yan Haibing for possessing Christian literature. In August 2004 in Zhejiang Province, the Government convicted Beijing-based house Christian Liu Fenggang and two other house Christians, Xu Yonghai and Zhang Shengqi, on charges of disclosing state secrets and sentenced them to 3, 2, and 1 year in prison, respectively. The Government had detained them in 2003 and had charged them with providing information about abuse of Christians in the country to an overseas Chinese magazine. In June 2004, the government-run Legal Daily newspaper reported that Jiang Zongxiu had died in police custody in Zunyi, Guizhou Province, after being arrested for distributing Bibles. A Legal Daily editorial comment condemned local officials for mistreating Jiang.

Protestant religious retreats were disrupted on many occasions. In June, July, and August 2004, dozens of house Christians were detained for attending separate events in Xinjiang, Sichuan, Henan, and Hubei Provinces. In May 2005, nearly 500 house Christians reportedly were detained at meetings in Jilin Province. The vast majority was released within a few weeks, but up to 100 reportedly remained detained.

Gong Shingling and several other leaders of the unregistered South China Church reportedly continued to suffer abuse in prison during the period covered by this report. Sentenced to death in 2001 on criminal charges including rape, arson, and assault, Gong Shengliang, Xiu Fuming, and Hu Yong had their sentences reduced to life in prison on retrial in 2002. Li Ying and Bang Kun Gong had their sentences reduced from death to 15 years in prison. Four female church members who signed statements accusing Gong of sexual crimes were rearrested in 2002 and sentenced to 3 years' reeducation-through-labor, reportedly for recanting their accusations against Gong. There were reports that Gong has suffered physical abuse in prison, in part for refusing to abandon his religious beliefs. Elderly church member Chen Jingmao reportedly was abused in a Changning prison for attempting to convert inmates to Christianity. Authorities prevented lawyers for both men from meeting with their clients in jail and from filing appeals on behalf of both men. Government officials and some registered and unregistered Protestants accused the South China Church of being a "cult."

A number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during 2004, prompting Vatican officials to make formal protests. In Hebei Province, traditionally the home of many Catholics, friction between unofficial Catholics, the government-sanctioned Patriotic Church, and some local authorities continued. Hebei authorities reportedly have forced underground priests and believers to choose between joining the official Church or facing punishment such as fines, job loss, periodic detentions, and having their children barred from school. Some Catholic officials have been forced into hiding. Ongoing harassment of underground bishops and priests was reported in recent years, including government surveillance and repeated short detentions. Many of those harassed and detained were over

70 years old.

Numerous detentions of unofficial Catholic clergy were reported, in Hebei Province in particular. In December 2004, the Government detained Bishop Zhao Zhendong of Xuanhua and, in late March 2005, his aide Father Zhao Kexun disappeared. The whereabouts of both men remained unknown and prompted criticism from the Vatican. The Government several times detained underground Bishop Jia Zhiguo for a few days and confined him to his home or church. Authorities reportedly detained other Catholics from the underground church, including Bishop Yao Liang of Xiwanzi, in April just before the death of Pope John Paul II. In August 2004, eight priests and two seminarians were reportedly detained in Quyang County.

Underground Bishop Su Zhimin, who had not been seen since his reported detention in 1997, reportedly was hospitalized in November 2003 in Baoding, Hebei Province. Reports suggest that he had been held in a form of "house arrest." The Government continued to deny having taken "any coercive measures" against him and stated he was "traveling as a missionary." Reliable sources reported that Bishop Su's auxiliary bishop, An Shuxin, as well as Father Han Dingxian of Hebei and Father Li Hongye of Henan remain in detention. Shandong Province Bishop Gao Kexian died in a Chinese prison in August 2004 after having been detained there since 1997. According to several NGOs, a number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during the period covered by this report.

Authorities detained Buddhist leader Yu Tianjian in August 2004 after he planned a rededication ceremony for a temple in Inner Mongolia Autonomous region involving foreign practitioners. The Government said Yu had falsified his credentials as a "living Buddha." Authorities detained several members of the Buddhist Foundation of America for a short period of time in connection with the temple closure. The whereabouts of Yu Tianjian remained unknown.

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

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, some religious prisoners were released early from prison, including Uighur Muslim Rebiya Kadeer.

Depending on implementation, new legislation governing religious affairs that took effect in March has the potential to improve respect for religious freedom, to enhance legal protection for religious groups, and to strengthen the process of governing religious affairs according to law..

Section III. Societal Attitudes

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

wealthier Han Chinese. There also has been occasional tension between the Han and the Hui, a Muslim ethnic group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country, using both focused external pressure on abuses and support for positive trends within the country. President Bush regularly raised religious freedom in his meetings with Chinese leaders, including in his November 2004 meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao at the APEC summit. Secretary Rice discussed religious freedom and attended a church service during her March 2005 visit to Beijing. In exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, diplomatic personnel consistently urged both central and local authorities to respect citizens' rights to religious freedom and release all those serving prison sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested vigorously whenever there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and they requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. At the same time, U.S. officials argued to the country's leaders that freedom of religion can strengthen, not harm, the country.

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

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

During the period covered by this report, the Government continued its suspension of the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, which had included religious freedom as a major agenda item. The most recent Dialogue session took place in December 2002, at which the Government committed to invite the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to visit the country. These visits did not occur during the period of this report. In January, USCIRF members visited Hong Kong, a visit authorities from the country publicly criticized.

During the period covered by this report, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor traveled to the country twice to discuss human rights and religious freedom issues with the Government. Staff members of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, including of the Office for International Religious Freedom, also traveled to the country to discuss religious freedom issues. They met with government officials responsible for religion and with clergy or practitioners in official and unofficial religious groups.

U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing continued to protest individual incidents of abuse. On numerous occasions, the Department of State, the Embassy, and the four Consulates in the country protested government actions to curb freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, including the arrests of Falun Gong followers, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, and Catholic and Protestant clergy and believers. The Embassy routinely raised reported cases of detention and abuse of religious practitioners with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Administration of Religious Affairs, except from March through November 2004, during which the Government unilaterally implemented a policy of refusing to discuss such cases with Embassy officials in response to U.S. sponsorship of a resolution on Chinese human rights at the March 2004 session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

Since 1999, the Secretary of State has designated China as a "Country of Particular Concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Economic measures in effect against China under the IRFA relate to restriction of exports of crime control and detection instruments and equipment (Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, P.L. 101-246).

TIBET

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

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief, and the Government's February White Paper on "Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China" states, "Organs of self-government in autonomous areas, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and relevant laws, respect and guarantee the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities, and safeguard all legal and normal religious activities of people of ethnic minorities;" however, the Government maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although the authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed activities they viewed as vehicles for political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence, such as religious activities venerating the Dalai Lama (which the Chinese Government described as "splittist").

Overall, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report; however, the atmosphere for religious freedom varied from region to region. Conditions were generally more relaxed in Tibetan autonomous areas outside the TAR, with the exception of parts of Sichuan's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Envoys of the Dalai Lama made visits to China for discussions with Chinese officials in 2002, 2003 and 2004. Although in the past there were reports of the deaths of monks and nuns due to maltreatment in prison, there were no known reports during this period; however, Buddhist leaders such as Gendun Choekyi Nyima and Tenzin Deleg remained in detention or prison, and the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism such as the Dalai Lama and the Karmapa Lama remained in exile. Dozens of monks and nuns continued to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic education." The Government refused free access to Tibetan areas for international observers, tightly controlled observers who were granted access, and tightly controlled publication of information about conditions in Tibet. These restrictions made it impossible to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations.

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

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The Tibetan areas of China have an area of 871,649 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas was 5,354,540. Most Tibetans practiced Tibetan Buddhism and, to a lesser extent, the traditional Tibetan Bon religion. This held true for many Tibetan government officials and Communist Party members. Bon includes beliefs and ceremonies that practitioners believe predate the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet in the 7th century. Other residents of Tibetan areas include Han Chinese, who practice Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and traditional folk religions; Hui Muslims; Tibetan Muslims; and Christians. There are 4 mosques in the TAR with approximately 3,000 Muslim adherents, as well as a Catholic church with 560 parishioners, which is located in the traditionally Catholic community of Yanjing in the eastern TAR. There may be small numbers of Falun Gong practitioners among the Han Chinese population.

The Government's February White Paper stated that, by the end of 2003, there were 1,700 sites in the TAR for Buddhists to conduct religious activities, and some 46,000 resident monks and nuns. Officials have cited almost identical figures since 1996, although the numbers of monks and nuns dropped at many sites as a result of the "patriotic education" campaign and the expulsion from monasteries and nunneries of many monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama or who were found to be "politically unqualified."

These numbers represent only the TAR, where the number of monks and nuns was very strictly controlled. According to official figures, Sichuan Province's Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is home to 515 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and 38,000 monks and nuns. Informed observers estimate that a total of 60,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns live in Tibetan areas outside the TAR.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government sought to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of the activity of

religious groups. The Government remained wary of Tibetan Buddhism in general and its links to the Dalai Lama, and it maintained tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas. Although the authorities permitted many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppressed any activities which they viewed as vehicles for political dissent. This included religious activities that officials perceived as supporting the Dalai Lama or Tibetan independence.

On March 1, 2005, the State Council introduced new religious affairs regulations that superseded the Government's 1994 regulations on the management of religious sites. The regulations' preamble stated that the provisions aim to protect freedom of religious belief, maintain harmony between different religions and society, and regulate religious affairs throughout the country. On January 17, 2005, according to a Chinese Government website, TAR Vice Chairman Jagra Lobsang Tenzin told a meeting of TAR officials that the regulations provided "a legal weapon to resist foreign forces' taking advantage of religion to infiltrate our country."

In September 2004, the Government extended invitations to emissaries of the Dalai Lama to visit Tibetan and other areas of China. The delegation visited Guangdong, Beijing, and Tibetan areas of western Sichuan Province. This marked the third visit of emissaries of the Dalai Lama to China in as many years. On previous visits in 2002 and 2003, Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's Special Envoy, and Kelsang Gyaltsen, the Dalai Lama's Envoy, had traveled to Beijing, Lhasa, Shanghai, and Tibetan areas of Yunnan Province. Additionally, Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, visited in 2002, making his first trip to the TAR since leaving in 1959 and subsequently made additional private visits to China. The Government asserted that the door to dialogue and negotiation was open, provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirmed that Tibet and Taiwan were inseparable parts of China.

Since the establishment of the TAR in 1965, the Government asserted it has spent \$36 million (RMB 300 million) for restoration of the TAR's Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, many of which were destroyed before and during the Cultural Revolution. In 2002, the Government undertook a project to restore the TAR's three most prominent cultural sites, the Potala Palace, the Norbulingka (another former residence of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa), and Sakya Monastery (the seat of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism in rural southern TAR).

Despite these and other efforts, many monasteries destroyed during the Cultural Revolution were never rebuilt or repaired, and others remained only partially repaired. The Government stated that funding restoration efforts was done to support the practice of religion, but it also was done in part to promote the development of tourism in Tibetan areas. Most recent restoration efforts were funded privately, although a few religious sites also were receiving government support for reconstruction projects at the end of the period covered by this report.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government officials closely associated Buddhist monasteries with pro-independence activism in Tibetan areas of China. Spiritual leaders encountered difficulty re-establishing historical monasteries due to lack of funds, general limitations on monastic education, and denials of government permission to build and operate religious institutions, which officials in some areas contended were a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. The Government stated that there were no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, and that each monastery's Democratic Management Committee (DMC) decided independently how many monks the monastery could support. Many of these committees were government-controlled, and, in practice, the Government imposed strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, particularly in the TAR. The Government had the right to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders; however, the Government did not necessarily exercise this right in practice during the year. Authorities curtailed the traditional practice of sending young boys to monasteries for religious training by means of regulations that forbade monasteries from accepting individuals under the age of 18. Nevertheless, some monasteries continued to admit younger boys, often delaying their formal registration until the age of 18.

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

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

some monasteries with extra income, they also deflected time and energy from religious instruction. There were reports of disagreements between monastic leaders and government officials over visitors, vehicle traffic, and culturally inappropriate construction near monastic sites. In July 2004, authorities permitted resumption of the Geshe Lharampa examinations, the highest religious examination in the Gelug sect of Tibetan Buddhism, at Lhasa's Jokhang Temple for the first time in 16 years.

Government officials have stated that the "patriotic education" campaign, which began in 1996 and often consisted of intensive, weeks-long sessions conducted by outside work teams, ended in 2000. However, officials stated openly that monks and nuns undergo political education, also known as "patriotic education," on a regular basis, generally less than four times a year, but occasionally more frequently, at their religious sites. Since primary responsibility for conducting political education shifted from government officials to monastery leaders, the form, content, and frequency of training at each monastery appeared to vary widely; however, conducting such training remained a requirement and had become a routine part of monastic management.

The Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 2,427 Tibetan new arrivals approached UNHCR in Nepal during 2004, of whom 2,338 were found to be "of concern" and of whom 2,318 were provided with basic assistance; the remaining 89 Tibetan new arrivals departed for India without being registered or processed by UNHCR. Press reports indicate that about 400 TAR residents traveled abroad in 2004. Many Tibetans, particularly those from rural areas, continued to report difficulties obtaining passports. The application process was not transparent, and residents of different Tibetan areas reported obstacles ranging from bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption to denials based on the applicant's political activities or beliefs. Police in China have stated that passport regulations permit them to deny passports to those whose travel will "harm the national security and national interests."

Due in part to the difficulties faced by many Tibetans in obtaining passports, and in part to the difficulty many Chinese citizens of Tibetan ethnicity encountered obtaining entry visas for India, it was difficult for Tibetans to travel to India for religious purposes. For example, in January 2005, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that authorities revoked permission for a group of Tibetans from Kardze prefecture to travel to India and Nepal on pilgrimage. In 2003, Tibetans forcibly repatriated to China from Nepal reportedly suffered torture, and their family members pressured by officials for bribes to secure their release. Nevertheless, many Tibetans, including monks and nuns, visited India via third countries and returned to China after temporary stays. Some returned exiles reported that authorities pressured them not to discuss sensitive political issues.

The Karmapa Lama, leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kagyu sect and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, remained in exile following his 1999 flight to India. The Karmapa Lama stated that he fled because of the Government's controls on his movements and its refusal either to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or to allow his teachers to come to him. Visitors to Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Lama, noted that the population of monks remained small and the atmosphere was subdued.

The Government routinely asserted control over the process of identifying and educating reincarnate lamas. For example, Government authorities closely supervised the current Reting Rinpoche, who is seven years old, and his education differed significantly from that of his predecessors.

The Government also strictly restricted contacts between reincarnate lamas and the outside world. For example, young incarnate lama Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa Lama in 1994, lived under government supervision at Nenang Monastery. Foreign delegations have been refused permission to visit him.

Government officials maintained that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama was not illegal. Nevertheless, authorities appeared to view possession of such photos as evidence of separatist sentiment when detaining individuals on political charges. Pictures of the Dalai Lama were not openly displayed in major monasteries and could not be purchased openly in the TAR. In August 2004, TAR Deputy Chairman Wu Jilie told visiting Western journalists that not displaying the Dalai Lama's photo was the voluntary choice of most TAR residents. In April, the Tibetan government-in-exile reported that police raided the homes of Tibetans living near the TAR border town of Dram and confiscated pictures and speeches of the Dalai Lama. The Government also continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama. Photos of the "official" Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, were not publicly displayed in most places, most likely because most Tibetans refuse to recognize him as the Panchen Lama.

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

level RAB officials practiced Buddhism.

Security was intensified during the Dalai Lama's birthday, sensitive anniversaries, and festival days in the TAR and in some other Tibetan areas. The prohibition on celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6 continued. In August 2004, some Lhasa residents privately expressed unhappiness with city authorities' plans to fix the date of the Drepung Shodon festival, which traditionally varied according to the Tibetan lunar calendar, to promote tourism. Residents were reportedly permitted to carry out observances on the traditional date a week later.

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

Following the death of charismatic leader Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog in January 2004, the Serthar Buddhist Study Institute in Western Sichuan's Serthar County remained under tight government control. Officials restricted access and barred all foreigners from entering the compound. Authorities demolished students' makeshift shelters and refused requests to build new structures at the site. Officials also pressured monastic leaders to postpone the search for Jigme Phuntsog's reincarnation.

In July 2004, Tibetan and Chinese intellectuals succeeded in their petition drive to prevent Han Chinese sportsman Zhang Jian from swimming across Lake Namtso in the TAR, which many Tibetan Buddhists hold to be sacred.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

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

During the period covered by this report, authorities did not respond to international calls for an inquiry into the case of Nyima Dragpa. A monk from Nyitso Monastery in Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture, Nyima Dragpa died in custody in October 2003, allegedly from injuries sustained during severe beatings.

The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltzen Norbu, 15, the boy it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama's 11th reincarnation. The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, 16, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama in 1995 as the 11th Panchen Lama (when he was 6 years old), and his whereabouts were unknown. Government officials have claimed that the boy is under government supervision, at an undisclosed location, for his own protection and attends classes as a "normal schoolboy." All requests from the international community for access to the boy to confirm his well-being have been refused.

Gyaltzen Norbu traveled June 12-28, 2005, to Sichuan, where he attended religious observances and met with officials. In November 2004, the Associated Press reported that Communist officials met with Buddhist leaders in Qinghai Province and warned that the Buddhist leaders would be punished if they failed to win greater support for Beijing's policies toward the exiled Dalai Lama and greater acceptance among their followers for Gyaltzen Norbu. In September 2004, as well as in February and March 2005, the Chinese government made efforts to bolster the legitimacy of the boy by publicizing a meeting with President Hu Jintao, arranging an interview with the South China Morning Post, and releasing statements in which the boy both praised the Communist Party and criticized China's weapons expenditures. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists continued to recognize Gendun Choekyi Nyima as the Panchen Lama.

Officials still have not confirmed the whereabouts of lama Chadrel Rinpoche, rumored to be held under house arrest, and refused requests from the international community to meet with him. The lama had been imprisoned previously for allegedly betraying state secrets while helping the Dalai Lama choose the incarnation of the 11th Panchen Lama. In August 2003, the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) reported that Champa Chung, 56-year-old former assistant of Chadrel Rinpoche, remained in custody after the expiration of his original 4-year prison term in 1999.

In February 2004, police in Lhasa arrested Choeden Rinzen, a monk, for possessing a Tibetan national flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama, according to Radio Free Asia.

According to statistics published in February by the Tibet Information Network (TIN), between 130 and 135

Tibetans were imprisoned on political grounds, approximately two-thirds of whom are monks or nuns. Approximately 55 political prisoners remained in TAR Prison (also known as Drapchi Prison) in Lhasa, most serving sentences on the charge of "counterrevolution," which was dropped from the Criminal Law in 1997. Chinese authorities have stated that acts previously prosecuted as counterrevolutionary crimes continue to be considered crimes under state security laws. TIN's analysis indicated that the majority of Tibetan political prisoners were incarcerated in Lhasa and western Sichuan Province. The overall number of political prisoners in Tibetan areas dropped slightly compared to 2004, according to TIN, but rose in Tibetan autonomous areas of Sichuan Province in connection with several high-profile cases. Prison authorities continued to subject imprisoned monks and nuns to torture. In one interview, a nun reported that prison authorities forced her and other inmates to stand on flooded prison floors in winter.

Although Tibetan Buddhists in Tibetan areas outside of the TAR enjoy relatively greater freedom of worship than their coreligionists within the TAR, religious expression by Tibetan Buddhists outside the TAR has also at times resulted in detention and arrest. On January 26, authorities commuted prominent religious leader Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche's two-year suspended death sentence to life in prison. Police arrested the leader in April 2002 for his alleged connection with a series of bombings. Authorities executed Tenzin Deleg's former associate, Lobsang Dondrub, on January 26, 2003, for his alleged participation. Lobsang Dondrub's execution occurred despite Chinese Government assurances that they would afford both individuals full due process, and that the national-level Supreme People's Court would review their sentences.

In 2003, five monks and an unidentified lay artist, all from Ngaba Prefecture in Sichuan Province, received sentences of 1 to 12 years' imprisonment for alleged separatist activities, including painting a Tibetan national flag, possessing pictures of the Dalai Lama, and distributing materials calling for Tibetan independence.

In September 2004, RFA reported that authorities in Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture sentenced Tibetan Buddhist monks Chogri and Topden and layman Lobsang Tsering to 3-year jail terms for putting up pro-independence posters. The three were reportedly among a group of 60 individuals detained on July 27 at a ceremony at Chogri Monastery in Draggo County, Kardze. RFA claimed that police beat some of those detained. It was believed that the other 57 individuals initially detained had been released by the end of 2004.

In October 2004, RFA reported that police in Qinghai's Golog Prefecture shot and killed Tibetan Buddhist religious leader Shetsul after he and other monks demanded that the police pay for medical treatment for injuries suffered while in custody.

In January 2005, the organization Guchusum reported that authorities arrested Phuntsok Tsering, the chant master of Magar Dhargyeling monastery in Lhatse County, TAR, in December 2004 for possessing a portrait of the Dalai Lama and writings on Tibetan nationalism.

In February 2005, RFA reported that authorities had sentenced five Tibetan monks from Dakar Treltzong Monastery in Tsolho Prefecture, Qinghai -- Tashi Gyaltzen, Tsultrim Phelgyal, Tsesum Samten, Jhamphel Gyatso, and Lobsang Thargyal -- to sentences of between 2 and 3 years. Police reportedly arrested the monks in January for publishing politically sensitive poems in a monastery newsletter.

In May 2005, TCHRD reported that authorities sentenced monks Kunchog Tenpa and Tsundue Gyamtso of Taktsang Lhamo Kirti Monastery in Dzoeg County, Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, to three years' imprisonment. Police arrested the monks in January 2003 for posting pro-independence posters. In July 2003, authorities closed Kirti Monastic School, which is affiliated with Taktsang Lhamo Kirti Monastery, and summoned its chief patron, Soepa Nagur, to Sichuan's capital city Chengdu. Soepa Nagur's current whereabouts are unknown.

In May 2005, TCHRD reported that authorities sentenced two monks from Sichuan's Kardze Prefecture -- Lobsang Khedrub and Gyalpo -- to 11-year prison terms. Police reportedly arrested the monks in January and February 2004 for displaying the banned Tibetan national flag.

Other religious figures remained imprisoned during the period covered by this report, including Lhasa orphanage owners Jigme Tenzin and Nyima Choedron, convicted in 2002 of "espionage and endangering state security," Jigme Gyatso, a Ganden Monastery monk serving a 15-year sentence for establishing a pro-independence group, and Ngawang Phuljung, serving a 19-year sentence for leading a group of 10 monks from Drepung Monastery in a 1989 protest.

There were some positive developments regarding the early release of prisoners. In February 2005, the Dui Hua Foundation confirmed the release of two Tibetans named Thatso and Thongtso (who may be nuns) in July 2004 at the conclusion of their three-and-a-half-year sentences for "inciting splittism," later reduced by ten months.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism. The Christian population in Tibetan areas of China is extremely small. Some converts to Christianity may have encountered societal pressure.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

Prior to the January 2005 commutation of Tenzin Delek's death sentence, numerous high-level U.S. officials including the Ambassador and the Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor raised concerns about his case in meetings with Chinese officials.

Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination. U.S. officials in Washington, Beijing and Chengdu pressed for the release of Geshe Sonam Phuntsog and other Tibetan Buddhist prisoners, advocated for international access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, and urged the Chinese Government to pursue dialogue with the Dalai Lama and his representatives.

U.S. diplomatic personnel stationed in the country maintain contacts with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in the Tibetan areas, and they traveled regularly to the TAR and other Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom.

U.S. development and exchange programs aim to strengthen Tibetan communities in China and preserve their environmental and cultural heritage. Both are inextricably linked to Tibet's Buddhist religious tradition. The U.S. Mission in China has also promoted religious dialogue through its exchange visitor program, which financed the travel of several prominent scholars of traditional Tibetan culture and religion to the United States.

HONG KONG

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

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

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

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) occupies 422 square miles on more than 200 islands and the mainland, and its population is an estimated 6.9 million. Approximately 43 percent of the population participates in some form of religious practice. The two largest religions are Buddhism and Taoism, which are often celebrated together in the same temple. Hong Kong is home to approximately 700,000 Buddhists or Taoists, 300,000 Protestant Christians, 240,000 Roman Catholics, and 70,000

Muslims. There are small numbers of Hindus, Sikhs, and Jews. Many persons also hold Confucian beliefs, although few practice it as a formal religion. Representatives of the spiritual movement Falun Gong state that their practitioners number approximately 500, although HKSAR government officials report the number is lower.

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

There are approximately 600 Buddhist and Taoist temples, an estimated 800 Christian churches and chapels, 4 mosques, 1 Hindu temple, 1 Sikh temple, and 1 synagogue. Christian congregations have been known to share churches. Catholics are served by 309 priests, 60 monks, and 519 nuns, all of whom maintain traditional links to the Vatican. More than 286,000 children are enrolled in 320 Catholic schools and kindergartens. The Assistant Secretary General of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference has his office in Hong Kong. Protestant churches run 3 colleges and more than 750 schools and nurseries. Religious leaders tend to focus primarily on local spiritual, educational, social, and medical needs. Some religious leaders and communities maintain active contacts with their mainland and international counterparts. Catholic and Protestant clergy are invited to give seminars on the mainland, teach classes there, and develop two-way student exchanges on an ongoing basis. Numerous foreign missionary groups operate in and out of the HKSAR.

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

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Falun Gong, which considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is registered under the Societies Ordinance, practices freely, and is able to stage public demonstrations. Falun Gong practitioners regularly conducted public protests against the crackdown on fellow practitioners in the PRC. In November 2004, the Court of Appeal overturned the convictions of 16 Falun Gong practitioners who had been fined for obstructing the Central Government Liaison Office during a sit-in protest in 2002. In May 2005, the Court of Final Appeal overturned the convictions of eight Falun Gong practitioners who had been charged with obstructing and assaulting police officers during the same sit-in protest. These rulings affirmed the protection of Hong Kong's fundamental freedoms of assembly, demonstration, and expression under the Basic Law. Other spiritual exercise groups, including Xiang Gong and Yan Xin Qigong, are also registered and practiced freely in the HKSAR.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The Basic Law calls for ties between Hong Kong religious organizations and their mainland counterparts to be based on "nonsubordination, noninterference, and mutual respect." This provision has not affected religious freedom in the HKSAR. In April 2004, the head of Hong Kong's Catholic Diocese, Bishop Joseph Zen, who has been an outspoken critic of both mainland and HKSAR policies, was allowed to travel to the mainland for the first time since 1998.

The spiritual group Falun Gong is generally free to practice, organize, conduct public demonstrations, and attract public attention for its movement. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in the HKSAR is reported to have dropped from approximately 1,000 to approximately 500 since the crackdown on the mainland began in mid-1999, although government officials claim that the number is lower for both periods. During the period covered by this report, Falun Gong regularly conducted public protests against the repression of fellow practitioners in the PRC, holding daily protests in the vicinity of the Hong Kong offices of the PRC Government.

The Government has prevented some Falun Gong practitioners from entering the country. During April and May 2004, the Government barred 41 Falun Gong practitioners from entering the SAR for "security reasons." Most of the practitioners were attempting to attend Falun Gong's annual conference at a privately owned facility. Approximately 350 practitioners were granted entry to attend the conference of approximately 700 persons.

In February 2003, the Government barred 80 Taiwanese Falun Gong practitioners from entering Hong Kong to attend an annual conference, although another 380 Taiwanese practitioners in the same group were admitted. The local Falun Gong association, on behalf of four of the overseas practitioners who were denied entry, submitted an application for judicial review of the Immigration Department's decision to refuse entry. In October 2003, the court rejected the application on grounds that the group's chairman was found to have insufficient standing to file the case.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

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

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

Falun Gong claims that it frequently experiences discrimination from private businesses in Hong Kong. In July 2004, a Falun Gong practitioner claimed that the group had submitted 72 applications to rent a government venue for its 2001 and 2002 conferences but was told each time that the venues were already booked. According to the Falun Gong practitioner, the group later discovered that, on the relevant dates, one of the requested venues was empty. In 2004, a private hotel canceled a Falun Gong banquet room booking because of the group's "terrorist risk," according to Falun Gong representatives. Falun Gong successfully sued the hotel in small claims court.

While at least two bookstores continue to sell Falun Gong books, Hong Kong's two largest bookstore chains stopped carrying Falun Gong material after the PRC began its crackdown on the group in 1999. In March 2005, the printing company Falun Gong used to publish the Hong Kong edition of its Epoch Times refused to renew the group's contract, which expired in May 2005. Falun Gong alleges the contract was cancelled for political reasons. According to Falun Gong representatives, at least 10 other printing

companies had refused to print the paper, which is critical of mainland authorities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

MACAU

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

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

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

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The Macau SAR has an area of 13 square miles, and its population is approximately 461,000. According to 1996 census figures, which are the latest available, of the more than 355,000 persons surveyed, 60.9 percent had no religious affiliation, 16.8 percent were Buddhist, 13.9 percent were "other" (followers of a combination of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian beliefs), 6.7 percent were Roman Catholic, and 1.7 percent were Protestant. The number of active Falun Gong practitioners declined from approximately 100 persons to approximately 20 after the movement was banned in mainland China in 1999. There are approximately 100 Muslims in the Macau SAR.

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

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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

There is no state religion.

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

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

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

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Under the Basic Law, the PRC Government does not govern religious practices in the Macau SAR. The Basic Law states, "The Government of Macau Special Administrative Region, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious organizations or in the efforts of

religious organizations and believers in Macau to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau, or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the Region."

The Falun Gong, which considers itself a spiritual movement and not a religion, is not registered under the Societies Ordinance. Falun Gong practitioners continued their daily exercises in public parks where, according to the practitioners, the police observed them once or twice a month and checked identification. Falun Gong representatives claim they are often denied entry into Macau and, they claim, the denials are related to sensitive political periods. For example, Macau immigration officials refused to allow a prominent Falun Gong representative from Hong Kong to enter Macau in January 2005 following the death of former PRC Communist Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

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

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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

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