

Russia (74)

**2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom:****Russia**

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

U.S. Department of State, September 5, 2000

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22/11-00

RUSSIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, although the Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, in practice the Government does not always respect the provision for equality of religions, and some local authorities imposed restrictions on some religious minority groups. The commitment of the new Government under President Vladimir Putin to adhere to international standards of religious freedom remained unclear by mid-2000.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

The 1997 law on religion, which replaced a more liberal 1990 law, continues to be the focus of serious concern about the state of religious freedom in the country. One of the law's most controversial provisions is a requirement that a church must prove that it has existed for at least 15 years in the country before it is allowed to be registered as a full-fledged religious organization. (Registration as a religious organization is necessary in order for a religious community to rent or buy a facility, proselytize, publish literature, provide religious training, or conduct other activities.) In a November 1999 ruling, the Constitutional Court upheld the 15-year requirement but also permitted the registration of organizations that already were registered when the 1997 law was passed or that were willing to become a local branch of a larger registered denomination. The provision still severely restricts the activities of small, new, independent congregations. The 1997 law also requires that all religious organizations be registered by December 31, 2000. Due to several factors, the registration process has been slow, and a large number of religious organizations may remain unregistered by the end of 2000 and therefore may be subject to "liquidation" (that is terminated as a legal entity) by local authorities at the end of 2000. The lack of clarity in the 1997 law, combined with contradictions between federal and local law and varying interpretations of the law, furnish regional officials with pretexts to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Discriminatory practices at the local level also are attributable to the increased decentralization of power over the past several years and the relatively greater susceptibility of local governments to lobbying by majority religions, as well as to government inaction and discriminatory attitudes that are widely held in society. For example, articles heavily biased against religions considered "nontraditional" appear regularly in both the local and national press.

There were reports of harassment of members of religious minority groups. Several religious communities were forced to defend themselves in court from charges by local authorities that they were engaging in harmful activities; however, in many cases local courts demonstrated their independence by dismissing frivolous cases or rulings in favor of the religious organizations. As of mid-2000, it remained unclear whether any religious organization had ceased operations as a result of the 1997 religion law.

The U.S. Government has been active in encouraging respect for religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Consulates General actively investigated reports of violations of religious freedom, including anti-Semitic incidents. U.S. officials discuss these issues with a broad range of government officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis.

Section I. Government Policies on Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, although the Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, in practice the Government does not always respect the provision for equality of religions, and in some instances local authorities imposed restrictions on some groups.

In December 1990, the Soviet Government adopted a law on religious freedom designed to make all religions equal before the law. (After the breakup of the Soviet Union, this law became part of the Russian Federation's legal code.) The 1990 law forbade government interference in religion and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Registration of religious groups was not required; however, by registering groups obtained a number of advantages, for example, the ability to establish official places of worship and benefit from tax exemptions.

During the early and mid-1990's, many sectors of society, particularly nationalists and many members of the Russian Orthodox Church, were disturbed by a sharp increase in the activities of well-financed foreign missionaries. Many advocated limiting the activities of what they termed "nontraditional" religious groups and what sometimes were called "dangerous" or "totalitarian" sects. In October 1997, the Duma enacted a new, restrictive, and potentially discriminatory law on religion, which raised questions about the Government's commitment to international agreements honoring freedom of religion. This law replaced the progressive 1990 religion law that had helped facilitate a revival of religious activity. Passage of the law and its signature by then-President Boris Yeltsin prompted concern in the international community because, for the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Government had adopted legislation that could abridge fundamental human rights. Although President Yeltsin had rejected earlier drafts of the law, the Presidential Administration considered the

last version the least objectionable and concluded that, in view of the political situation, any further veto would have been overridden.

In its preamble (which government officials insist has no legal force), the 1997 religion law recognizes the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." It accords "respect" to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and certain other religions as an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage.

The 1997 religion law ostensibly targeted so-called "totalitarian sects" or dangerous religious cults. However, the intent of some of the law's sponsors appears to have been to discriminate against members of foreign and less well-established religions by making it difficult for them to manifest their beliefs through organized religious institutions. The critics of the law believe that the basic assumption behind the law is that religious groups must prove their innocence and their legitimacy before gaining the advantages of state recognition. Government officials, including then-President Boris Yeltsin and then-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, pledged that the law on religion would not result in any erosion of religious freedom in the country. As of mid-2000, the Presidential Administration under President Putin has yet to comment on the law. Presidential Administration officials have established consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and to monitor application of the law on religion. The Government continues to attempt to mitigate some of the law's most negative aspects and has shown some willingness to intervene with local authorities in defense of religious rights.

Government officials, some nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), and religious freedom experts believe that President Vladimir Putin's emphasis on centralization of power and strengthened rule of law could lead to improvements in the area of religious freedom. Putin has promised stricter and more consistent application of all laws. However, some other NGO's, religion-law experts, and representatives of religious groups point out that stricter implementation of the 1997 religion law could create opposite results. On one hand, stricter implementation of the 1997 federal law in the regions could compel some reluctant local authorities to stop blocking local registration of "nontraditional" religions. On the other hand, stricter implementation also could require local authorities to "liquidate" (that is terminate as a legal entity) by court order organizations that have failed to register by December 31, 2000. An amendment to extend the registration deadline in the 1997 law, signed on March 27, 2000 by President Putin, also changed a key phrase: organizations still unregistered after the deadline "are subject to liquidation" (rather than the previous text's "may be liquidated"). Some observers believe that the law now appears to require liquidation of unregistered organizations; however, other religion law experts consider the more precise phrasing, which appears to require the liquidation of all organizations that are unregistered by the deadline, less likely to be enforced, since the authorities would be unwilling to liquidate the large number of Russian Orthodox groups that they expect to remain unregistered at that time.

Given the inadequacy of regulatory guidance from the federal authorities on how to apply the 1997 law correctly, the shortage of knowledgeable local officials registering by the end of 2000 is expected to be a significant obstacle for many religious groups. Human rights observers remain deeply concerned that President Putin has not expressed a firm commitment to freedom of religion publicly and point to the continued public association of the Presidential Administration with the Russian Orthodox Church as evidence of favoritism.

In May 2000, President Putin took a significant step toward increasing federal control in the regions by signing a decree dividing the country into seven federal districts and naming to each of the seven regions a presidential representative. The Presidential Administration also reportedly is conducting a review of regional legislation that conflicts with federal law and the Constitution, including regional religion laws. According to the Presidential Administration, 30 of 89 regions have laws and decrees on religion that violate the Constitution by restricting the activities of religious groups; presumably they would have to be changed. However, as of June 30, 2000 it remained unclear whether the Federal Government had the necessary legal mechanisms and political will to bring all religion legislation into compliance with federal law.

The office of the Russian Federation Human Rights Plenipotentiary (a government entity created by the Parliament in 1997 and tasked with promoting human rights) has announced that it is setting up a department dedicated to religious freedom issues. Oleg Mironov of the office of Plenipotentiary publicly criticized the 1997 religion law in a memo to the Duma in April 1999 and recommended changes to bring it into accordance with the Constitution and international norms for religious freedom.

The 1997 law on religion is very complex, with many ambiguous and contradictory provisions. On its face, the law creates various categories of religious communities with differing levels of legal status and privileges. The law distinguishes between religious "groups" and "organizations," two mutually exclusive registration categories, and creates two categories of organizations: "regional" and "centralized." A religious "group" is a congregation of worshipers that does not have the legal status of a juridical person, meaning that it may not open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals. Groups are permitted to rent public spaces and hold services. Moreover, the law does not purport to abridge the rights of individual members of groups. For example, a member of a religious group could buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. However, in this case, the group would not enjoy tax benefits and other rights extended to religious organizations, such as proselytizing.

In contrast to religious groups, religious organizations, both local and centralized, are considered juridical persons, enjoy tax exemptions, and are permitted to proselytize, establish religious schools, host foreign

religious workers, and publish literature. The law provides that congregations that had existed for 15 years when the new law was enacted were eligible for registration as an organization. A "centralized religious organization" may be founded by a confession that has three functioning "local organizations" (each of which must have at least 10 members who are Russian citizens) in different regions. A centralized organization apparently has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without adhering to the 15-year rule. In implementing this provision, the Government has extended this definition to include a "registered centralized managing center."

The provisions that require that religious groups exist for 15 years before they may qualify for "organization status" and that relegate other religious entities to the status of "groups" are among the most controversial elements of the 1997 law. Critics of the law claimed that these articles violated the Constitution's provision of equality before the law of all confessions.

A constitutional challenge to the law on religion was filed with the Constitutional Court in May 1998 by the NGO the Institute for Religion and Law. It was based on the cases of a Khakasiya Pentecostal church and the Yaroslavl Jehovah's Witnesses. The petitioners claimed that the provision of the 1997 religion law requiring religious organizations to prove 15 years of existence in Russia in order to be registered is unconstitutional. In a November 23, 1999 hearing, the Constitutional Court upheld the 15-year provision but also ruled that religious organizations that were registered before the passage of the 1997 law were not required to prove 15 years' existence in the country in order to be registered. The Constitutional Court also upheld the right of the Government to place certain limits on the activity of religious groups in the interests of national security. The Institute and other experts described the decision as a sound and legally correct compromise.

However, under this ruling independent churches with less than 15 years in the country still are not able to register as religious organizations unless they affiliate themselves with existing centralized organizations. The Institute for Religion and Law and other NGO's point out that this is a significant restriction for small, independent religious communities. Some human rights activists also are concerned by language in the ruling that cites 1993 and 1996 decisions in the European Court of Human Rights regarding religious "sects," and upholds the right of the Government to place certain limits on the activity of religious groups in the interests of national security.

Despite the Federal Government's efforts to implement the religion law liberally and to provide assurances that religious freedom would be observed, restrictions continued at the local level. The vagueness of the law and regulations, the contradictions between federal and local law, and varying interpretations of the law provide regional officials with a pretext to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Discriminatory practices at the local level are attributable to the increased decentralization of power and the relatively greater susceptibility of local governments to lobbying by majority religions, as well as to

national government inaction and prejudicial attitudes that are widely held in society. Concerns continue that a large number of religious organizations may remain unregistered by the end of 2000 and therefore may be even more vulnerable to attempts by local authorities to restrict their activities.

Since 1994 30 of the country's 89 regional governments have passed laws and decrees intended to restrict the activities of religious groups. At the time the 1997 religion law was under discussion, its proponents argued that it was necessary in order to deal with the many restrictive local laws. However, the federal Government has not challenged effectively the unconstitutionality of these restrictions, although the Presidential Administration sent warnings to 30 regions regarding the unconstitutionality of local laws. Critics contend that the Federal Government should be more active in preventing or reversing discriminatory actions taken at the local level by more actively disseminating information to the regions and, when necessary, reprimanding the officials at fault. Observers also have proposed that the federal authorities take action to ensure that regional and local legislation or other actions do not contradict constitutional provisions protecting religious freedom. As part of President Putin's initiative to centralize power, the Presidential Administration currently is conducting an overall review of regional legislation and has stated that religion laws also would be addressed by this initiative.

The Russian Orthodox Church was involved actively in drafting the 1997 law on religion. It has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling to Russian military service members. These arrangements do not appear to be available to other religions. (In particular, Muslim religious leaders have complained that they are not permitted to minister to Muslim military service members.) The head of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, participates in most high-level official events and appears to have direct access to and influence with officials of the executive branch. The traditional view that Russian soil is an exclusively "Orthodox domain" leads to frequent criticism and intolerance of foreign religious groups that proselytize in the country. Many Orthodox Church officials condemn such "sheep stealing" when practiced by other Christian churches. Even well established foreign religious organizations have been characterized by some in the Orthodox leadership as "dangerous and destructive sects."

On June 4, 2000, news reports surfaced alleging that Chief Rabbi of Russia Adolf Shayeveich was urged by Presidential Administration officials to step down in favor of a prominent Lubavitcher rabbi, Berl Lazar. Rabbi Shayeveich later denied that the incident had occurred. On June 12, 2000, authorities arrested media magnate Vladimir Gusinskiy, the President of the Russian Jewish Congress President and a critic of the Government. On the same day, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia elected Rabbi Lazar Chief Rabbi of Russia, which created a schism in the Jewish community between supporters of Shayeveich and supporters of Lazar. This sequence of events aroused

serious concern among many observers that the Presidential Administration was attempting to meddle in intraconfessional affairs and prompted the Russian Jewish Congress to accuse the Administration publicly of a "divide and conquer" strategy against the Jewish community. In addition, on June 19, 2000, the Minister of Culture signed an agreement with the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia giving it, along with other organizations, the right to negotiate on behalf of the Jewish community for restituted property.

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

Religious Demography

There are no reliable statistics that break down the country's population by denomination, but available information suggests that approximately half of all citizens consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians (although the vast majority of these persons are not regular churchgoers). An opinion poll of 1,500 respondents conducted by Public Opinion in April 1999 found that 55 percent of the population consider themselves Orthodox Christian, 9 percent follow another religion, and 31 percent claim to be atheists. Another poll of some 4,000 respondents by the Center of Sociological Studies at Moscow State University in the spring of 1999 found that 43 percent claimed to be Orthodox Christians, while 51 percent described themselves as "religious believers" (not necessarily Orthodox). A separate poll found that in Moscow only 20 percent of respondents who identify themselves as Orthodox are regular churchgoers, while in the regions only 7 percent attend church regularly. According to January 2000 Ministry of Justice statistics, there are now 17,427 religious organizations registered nationwide. This figure represents a more than three-fold increase over the approximately 5,500 organizations registered in 1990. Over half of registered organizations are Russian Orthodox, 18 percent are Muslim, and 20 percent are Christian organizations other than Russian Orthodox. Jewish and Buddhist registered religious organizations each account for slightly less than 1 percent of the total number of organizations. Jehovah's Witnesses account for 2 percent of the total registered religious organizations, and the group reports that it has 250,000 members in the country. Ministry of Justice figures also show that approximately 5,000 nontraditional organizations are registered nationwide, representing a broad range of denominations and religious practices. Nontraditional registered organizations include Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), Evangelical Christian-Baptists,

Roman Catholics, Hare Krishnas, Seventh-Day Adventists, Lutherans, Baha'is, and offshoots of Russian Orthodox Christianity, as well as 227 organizations representing less well-known denominations. Other religions, including Buddhism and Shamanism, are practiced in specific localities where they are rooted in local traditions.

An agreement signed on May 23, 2000, between two large Russian state radio networks and an international Christian broadcaster, Trans World Radio, provides for airing evangelical Christian programs on 750 transmitters throughout Russia. The broadcasts began on June 1, 2000 on Radio Mayak and Radio Yunost.

Governmental Restrictions of Religious Freedom

The Constitutional Court's November 1999 ruling effectively legalized a number of religious organizations that were registered at the time the 1997 law was passed but could not prove 15 years of operation in the country. For example, in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, the 15-year rule no longer prevents the registration of newly created local Jehovah's Witnesses religious organizations, nor the reregistration of organizations that were registered at the time of implementation of the 1997 law but which were less than 15 years old.

The likely degree of adherence to this ruling by regional authorities remains unclear. Most observers agree that many local authorities remain unaware of this ruling and are uncertain as to how the 1997 law should be applied. In May 2000, the Russian State Academy of Public Service, in cooperation with local and foreign NGO's, attempted to address this problem by conducting a seminar on religion, which was attended by Ministry of Justice officials from 80 regions.

Between February 12 and June 3, 1998, the Government issued three sets of regulations governing implementation of the new law. While providing procedural guidelines for registration, the regulations failed to clarify many key definitional points in the law.

The case of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) reflects this confusion. The Society was denied federal registration in April 1999 because the Jesuit order's status, which is independent of a local bishop, does not meet requirements contained in the 1997 law's provisions. However, an April 13, 2000 Constitutional Court ruling authorized the Jesuits to be registered. This ruling, published in full on May 13, 2000 in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, referred extensively to passages in the November 1999 Constitutional Court ruling (which effectively legalized registered organizations existing at the time of the passage of the 1997 law). The April 2000 ruling also specifically refuted points cited by the Ministry of Justice as reasons for refusal. By mid-2000 the Society of Jesus was still negotiating certain points of its charter with the Ministry of Justice.

In the case of at least one religion, a federal government agency has been responsible for significant restrictions on the activities of a church. In some areas, foreign Roman Catholic religious workers must return to their home countries every 3 months in order to renew their visas,

unlike other foreign workers who may apply for multiple-entry visas or extend their stays.

In addition to ambiguities in the regulations, the considerable time, effort, and legal expense required by the registration process--which involves simultaneous registration at both the federal and local levels--represent major obstacles for a number of confessions. International and well-funded Russian religious organizations, in particular, began the reregistration process soon after publication of the regulations governing reregistration. Russian Pentecostal groups, which have a solid and growing network of churches throughout the country, sought guidance from the Ministry of Justice on reregistration as early as November 1997. One of the larger organizations, the Russian Unified Fellowship of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (which traces its origins back to the early 1900's) reregistered as a centralized religious organization by late March 1998. It since has incorporated many smaller, newer Pentecostal groups within its structure. However, a significant number of smaller congregations remain unaware of how (or in a few cases, may be reluctant) to comply with Russian registration and tax-inspection requirements.

According to a May 2000 report by the Keston Institute, registration of Muslim religious organizations also is proceeding slowly, with only a small percentage of local organizations registered. The delay is largely due to a struggle between the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in European Russia and Siberia, based in Ufa and led by Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin, and the Moscow-based Russian Council of Muftis, led by Chief Mufti Ravil Gainutdin. The Central Spiritual Directorate informed the Keston Institute that approximately 20 percent of its 2,500 local organizations have been registered. Mufti Gainutdin's organization is registered but did not have an estimate of how many of its local organizations were registered. Chief Mufti Gainutdin's staff complained that local authorities in some cases were obstructing the registration of local organizations that wished to join Gainutdin's rather than Tadzhuiddin's union, and that those who wished to leave Tadzhuiddin's Spiritual Directorate were being accused of "Wahhabism." In the Russian context, "Wahhabism," the name of a strict branch of Sunni Islam that originated in Saudi Arabia, has become a pejorative term because of persistent allegations that "Wahhabi extremism" is to blame for terrorist attacks linked to Chechnya.

The delay in reregistration was due in part to the slow pace at which the Federal Ministry of Justice has disseminated the regulations and guidelines to local authorities and in part to understaffing both at the Ministry of Justice and at local levels. In many instances, the Ministry of Justice has asked for additional information and has demanded changes in the organizational structure and by-laws of some groups to ensure that they are in conformity with the law. Smaller minority confessions also sometimes feared the registration process, while others started the process late because of the time involved in agreeing internally on how to register their organizations in conformity with the law. Katya Smyslova of the Esther Legal Assistance Center, an NGO that provides information to religious groups, reports that a significant

number of congregations are unaware of registration and tax inspection requirements.

Although reliable statistics are unavailable, observers estimated that as of mid-2000 just under half of the 400 of those requiring registration were registered at the federal level. Figures on the number of pending local registrations are also unavailable, but observers estimate that from one-half to two-thirds of the approximately 16,850 organizations required to reregister have not done so. The Institute for Religion and Law estimates that by the end of 2000, as many as one-third of local religious organizations will not be reregistered and therefore will be subject to liquidation.

In 1998 and early 1999, the Government attempted to address mounting concerns that a large number of religious organizations, particularly at the local level, might remain unregistered when the deadline passed at the end of 1999 and become left vulnerable to attempts by local authorities to restrict their activities. In June 1999, the Ministry of Justice recommended to regional directorates of justice that local religious organizations be reregistered. Religious groups reported in 1999 and early 2000 that local registrations began to be processed more easily after the recommendation. On August 2, 1999, a presidential decree was signed that clarified the relationship between the federal Ministry of Justice and the regional directorates of justice, stating that the directorates are "territorial organs of the Ministry." Observers and officials viewed this decree as a means to help bring insubordinate directorates more in compliance with federal policies, but, reflecting the decentralization of power of recent years, it appears to have had little effect.

Due to the Duma's failure to pass the amendment before the law's original deadline expired, between December 31, 1999 and March 26, 2000, approximately 8,400 religious organizations were left exposed to "liquidation" (closure by court order) on grounds of lack of registration. In an effort to forestall closures, which appears to have been largely successful, the Ministry of Justice in December 1999 sent a recommendation to regional authorities that they refrain from initiating legal proceedings to liquidate any organizations.

According to the Keston Institute and local NGO's, a small handful of religious organizations were threatened with liquidation due to lack of registration. In Voronezh, local administration officials filed petitions to liquidate 13 religious organizations on the basis of lack of registration in February, 2000, of which three cases were brought to court. The Institute of Religion and Law alerted the Ministry of Justice, which took prompt action to prevent the closures. Only one organization, a Pentecostal church, was liquidated. Local officials in Voronezh reportedly claimed that they were unaware of the federal Ministry's recommendation and subsequently withdrew petitions to liquidate the 10 remaining organizations. Although the incident alarmed religious freedom activists, in particular because none of the unregistered Russian Orthodox organizations were singled out, it appears that the proposed liquidations would not have harmed all of the denominations in

question, because some of the organizations in question appeared to be either inactive or defunct. In Tatarstan the Church of Christ in Kazan was reportedly liquidated in April 2000 for allegedly holding a church conference without the permission of local authorities. The Kostroma regional department of justice was preparing lawsuits in June 2000 to dissolve the Kostroma Christian Center and Grace Church Evangelical Christians for allegedly violating the religion law by using "hypnosis" during their services. The department refused to register the two groups and authorized a committee of experts of the regional administration to evaluate the groups. The actions came after reports appeared on Kostroma state television accusing Pentecostal groups of using hypnosis during services.

While there were few efforts at liquidation, local authorities resisted the registration efforts of congregations belonging to a number of faiths. Jehovah's Witnesses report a total of 1,000 congregations in Russia, not all of which require registration. In 1998 and 1999, local authorities were refusing to register some local organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses, pending federal level registration and the resolution of a Moscow municipal court case against Jehovah's Witnesses in that city under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law. Jehovah's Witnesses and religious rights activists welcomed the Ministry of Justice's April 30, 1999 decision to reregister Jehovah's Witnesses at the federal level, and Jehovah's Witnesses reported in May 2000 that since the new religion law went into force on October 1, 1997, it has registered a total of 337 local religious organizations in 65 regions of the country. However, as of April 2000, local authorities in 14 regions refused to register local Jehovah's Witnesses organizations, and no Jehovah's Witnesses organizations have been registered in St. Petersburg, although there are some 7,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses there, according to the group's representatives. As of May 2000, the Moscow directorate of justice refused registration to Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow eight times, despite the precedent set by the Ministry of Justice's April 30 decision to reregister Jehovah's Witnesses at the federal level. Although there is no legal basis to do so, the directorate may be refusing registration pending resolution of the outstanding civil case against Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. The civil case against the Jehovah's Witnesses has been adjourned for over 1 year, following a March 1999 municipal ruling to refer the case to an expert panel for a recommendation. In the absence of reregistration, the group is subject to liquidation by court order after December 31, 2000. Moreover, according to representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses, as of May 31, 2000, there were liquidation warnings and actions to ban Jehovah's Witnesses at various levels of the judicial system in Novokuznetsk, Pechora (Komi), Prokhladnyi (Kabardino-Balkaria), Saratov, and Ushaly (Bashkortostan). An appellate court in Lipetsk ruled in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses after the group's registration was denied, and Jehovah's Witnesses intend to challenge decisions in some of the 14 other regions where congregations have been denied registration.

Jehovah's Witnesses report that their applications for local registration in some regions have been referred to local expert panels, despite a recommendation by the federal Ministry of Justice expert panel which,

according to the Ministry of Justice, obviates the need for such review. Local expert studies of Jehovah's Witnesses have stalled registration efforts in Mari-El, Khabardino-Balkaria, Novgorod, and Orel. In Lipetsk a local expert study recommended the registration be refused, but in April 2000 the Lipetsk regional court ordered the Lipetsk justice department to register Jehovah's Witnesses under their standard nationwide charter.

Keston reported in March 2000 that Voronezh officials refused to register the Community of All Saints of the True Orthodox Church, an Orthodox Christian congregation that left the Moscow Russian Orthodox Patriarchate in the early 1990's. Parish priest Valeriy Kravets said that Orthodox communities outside the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate that met secretly in the apartments of members and hid successfully from the KGB during the Soviet era, now are finding it nearly impossible to register.

The Unification Church had 15 local organizations registered under the old law. By mid-2000, three organizations, including organizations in Ul'yanovsk and Ufa, had reregistered under the new law and the efforts of four others, in Yakutsk, Samara, Yekaterinburg, and Perm, were rejected. The efforts of the Central Unification Church to register as a centralized religious organization have been denied 3 times for various reasons.

The Salvation Army has registered local organizations in St. Petersburg, Rostov-on-Don, and Volgograd, and currently is seeking federal registration as a centralized religious organization.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) has registered successfully 20 local religious organizations. After some initial trouble concerning registration of missionaries residing in the cities of Tolyatti and Novokuybyshevsk in the Samara region, by November 1999 the Church was able to agree with the Samara directorate of justice to establish registered local organizations in these cities in order to allow Mormon missionaries to reside there legally.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints since mid-1998 has been attempting to register its organizations in Kazan, Tatarstan as a local religious organization. After an earlier rejection, the court responded to a second appeal by transferring the case to a so-called "religious expertise assessment" in accordance with the Tatarstan law on religion. The assessment was supposed to have been completed by January 2000, but was not completed by mid-2000. Lack of registration has made it difficult for American missionaries, who would be sponsored by the local religious organization, to register their visas in Kazan. The local visa office refuses to register them as sponsored by an organization, but has told them that if individuals sponsor them, they can register. Despite these difficulties, the church has managed to rent space.

Registration problems persist in several regions. For example, the Moscow directorate of justice, reportedly on legally questionable

grounds, repeatedly has refused registration of at least five religious organizations, besides Jehovah's Witnesses, including the Salvation Army and the Church of Scientology. The Salvation Army has a lawsuit pending against the Moscow department of justice but has had great difficulty getting a hearing because the municipal court repeatedly attempted to dodge jurisdiction over the case. The Salvation Army eventually was forced to obtain a ruling from a higher court, assigning jurisdiction back to the original municipal court.

The directorate of justice in Chelyabinsk continues to reject the local registration application of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, based on the alleged incompatibility of church activities with federal law. Even without registration, the church continues to hold regular services without incident, although its missionaries have suspended their door-to-door canvassing and other outreach activities. The Chelyabinsk directorate of justice also has rejected the registration applications of Baptist, Adventist, and Pentecostal churches in Chelyabinsk on similar grounds. As of May 2000, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that the Chelyabinsk directorate of justice had refused the group's application for registration seven times.

Measures have been taken to restrict the activities of a number of foreign missionaries and of congregations associated with them. There were reports that four U.S. missionaries are being refused visas to return to Russia. Dan Pollard (formerly of the Vanino Baptist Church in the Khabarovsk region) currently is banned from receiving a visa based on allegations that he violated customs regulations and evaded property taxes; however, it appears that local authorities violated their own regulations and refused to take necessary actions (such as providing a timely tax assessment), which would have enabled Pollard to comply with the law. David Binkley of the Church of Christ in Magadan also faced a criminal charge for failing to report \$8,000 to customs officials, reportedly because he feared that the money would be stolen. He was acquitted in December 1999, primarily because the investigation and prosecution were marred by serious violations of due process by local authorities.

Local authorities then defied a court ruling to return the money, returning it briefly only to confiscate it a few minutes later, citing administrative customs regulations not applicable to the case. The third case, regarding Charles Landreth of the Church of Christ in Volgograd, appears to have been a response to articles in the local press accusing Landreth of being a spy. Those allegations may have led local authorities to recommend to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that a visa be refused. A member of the local congregation, who has sought to resolve the matter since January 2000, reported in May that since local authorities no longer object to Landreth's return, it appears to be federal authorities who still are refusing to authorize issuance of a visa. A fourth missionary, Monty Race of Evangelical Free Church of America, who entered the country legally with a visa sponsored by a Moscow congregation, has been refused registration to reside in Naberezhniy Chelny, Tatarstan. Race, who is married to a Russian citizen, also has been refused permission to register as a resident foreign spouse of a

Russian citizen. The letter of refusal he received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs' local passport control office cited "national security" concerns.

Since March 1998, the Vanino Baptist Church and Pollard have fought a legal battle over registration of the church so that it could sponsor Pollard or a replacement to remain in the country. Khabarovsk authorities continue to deny reregistration of the Vanino Baptist Church on extremely questionable legal grounds. This not only prevents the Vanino Baptist Church from sponsoring a visa for any foreign religious worker but also is likely to leave it subject to liquidation at the end of 2000. The most recent reason for refusal offered by a local justice official is that the church building must be reclassified from a residential to a nonresidential property before the church may use it as a juridical address. However, this official did not cite a specific local statute, and federal law does not prohibit using a residence for religious services.

Although it may be a slow and costly process for religious groups, the judicial system has provided an appeal process for religious organizations threatened with loss of registered status or "liquidation" as a religious organization under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law, expired registration, or other laws. Some local churches that were initially denied local registration have been registered following successful lawsuits, as in the case of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Khakasiya in November 1998, when the federal Supreme Court overturned the verdict of the Khakasiya supreme court. A few congregations also reported that local authorities that initially refused to register them relented after the churches said that they would take the matter to court. In May 1999, a Magadan municipal court dismissed for lack of evidence a local procurator's civil case against the Word of Life Pentecostal Church in the Far Eastern city of Magadan under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law, in which the Church was accused of using "cult" practices to manipulate its members. The Magadan oblast court upheld this decision in June 1999. The Church reports that investigation of the church on criminal and tax-related charges continues. Church representatives report that negative stories about them continue to appear in the local state-controlled press. Despite these difficulties, the Word of Life Pentecostal church continues its normal activities.

According to the Keston News Service and to the Slavic Law and Justice Center's Vladimir Ryakhovskiy, a Kirov municipal court on February 1, 2000 dismissed the petition of the Kirov department of justice to close the Kirov Christian Church, a member organization of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian Pentecostals. Local justice officials alleged that the Church used mass hypnosis to manipulate its followers and presented videotaped "evidence." Church lawyer Ryakhovskiy and a public prosecutor both successfully argued in court that the videotape, secretly filmed without the consent of the church, violated the congregation's right to privacy and could not be presented as legal evidence.

The department of justice in Cheboksary, Chuvashiya, petitioned for

liquidation of the Cheboksary Church of Christ. Officials accused the Church of violating a health protection law by praying for the sick, violating civil law by conducting services in the pastor's apartment, failing to register by the original December 31, 1999 deadline of the 1997 religion law, and involving minors in church activity without their parents' consent. In a January 20, 2000 hearing, Anatoliy Pchelintsev of the Institute of Religion and Law and Vladimir Ryakhovskiy of the Slavic Center for Law and Justice argued that these charges had no legal merit, as prayer is not a medical activity and religious services in residential apartments are not forbidden by law. Furthermore the children simply had watched videos of "Superbook," a children's program about the Bible that already had been broadcast in Russia for 2 years by government-controlled television. Nevertheless, the judge postponed the case for another hearing.

At mid-June 2000, Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow were continuing their effort to avoid legal "liquidation." Acting on a complaint from the Committee to Save Youth from Totalitarian Cults (a group allegedly linked to the Russian Orthodox Church), a Moscow municipal procurator is seeking "liquidation" of the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses organization under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law for its alleged antisocial, antifamily character. In March 1999, the trial was suspended pending review of the case by a panel of court-appointed religious experts. On June 28, 1999, the Moscow city court upheld the decision of the Golovinskiy municipal court to appoint an expert panel. As of mid-2000, the expert panel still was reviewing the case and was expected to render a split recommendation. Meanwhile Jehovah's Witnesses are preparing an appeal to the Supreme Court.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, the St. Petersburg case in which Nataliya Ilyina, the mother of a young mentally disabled woman, had brought suit against Jehovah's Witnesses, alleging that they psychologically damaged her daughter, Yekaterina Ilyina, remained unresolved. Jehovah's Witnesses lawyer Artur Leontyev claimed that the anticult group Committee for Family and Personality and also self-described "sectomania" expert and Moscow psychiatrist Fedor Kondratyev are responsible for the case being brought. An earlier court had ruled that the Church had not harmed Ilyina, whose mental disability existed well before she began attending services. The plaintiff requested a second study by experts, which was underway at mid-2000.

There are continuing reports that some local and municipal governments prevented religious groups from using venues such as cinemas that are suitable for large gatherings. In many areas of the country, government-owned facilities are the only available venues. As a result, in some instances, denominations that do not own property effectively have been denied the opportunity to practice their faith in large groups. For example, in August 1999, Jehovah's Witnesses nearly were forced to cancel a convention for 15,000 members of the group at Moscow's Olympic Stadium, reportedly because stadium management was under pressure from the Moscow city administration. The weekend convention also was disrupted briefly by a telephone bomb threat, but no device was found (see Section II).

According to representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses, as of spring 2000 four cases were being litigated in which police officers interrupted meetings or public preaching by Jehovah's Witnesses, including an April 16, 2000 incident in which police in Chelyabinsk broke up a small religious meeting of the sign-language congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The other cases occurred in St. Petersburg, Lensk, and Kislovodsk.

Some congregations also have reported difficulty obtaining necessary permits to renovate facilities and that local property owners were pressured by local officials to cancel leases signed with nontraditional religious churches. Although it remains a legally registered organization, Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow continue to have trouble leasing assembly space and obtaining the necessary permits to renovate their main building. Other religions, including Protestant groups and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, report that they continue to face discrimination in their ability to rent premises and conduct group activities. For example, in April in Kursk, the mayor refused Baptists and Muslims land and permission to build in the city.

Disputes concerning the return of religious property confiscated by the Soviet government are some of the most frequent complaints cited by religious groups. For the most part, synagogues, churches, and mosques have been returned to communities to be used for religious services. The Federal Government has met the requirements of the 1993 presidential decree on communal property restitution, and the decree continues to guide the ongoing process. According to statistics from the Ministry of State Property, over 2,000 federally owned properties have been returned to religious communities since 1989. However, jurisdiction in most cases is at the regional level, and there is no centralized source of information on these cases. A Ministry of Culture official responsible for restitution of religious historical monuments estimated in early 1999 that over 3,600 transfers of religious buildings had occurred at the regional level and that approximately 30 percent of property designated for return had been transferred back to its original owners at both the federal and regional levels. Nonetheless there continue to be reports of religious property that has not been returned. For example, the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Ryazan still has not been returned to the local Catholic community. The Moscow Patriarchate has claimed and taken possession of properties owned by other branches of Orthodoxy and, in certain cases, property of other religions. In some property disputes, religious buildings have been "privatized," and there are long delays in finding new locations for the current occupants, as required by law. Local authorities often refuse to get involved in property disputes, which they contend are between private organizations. Even where state or municipal authorities still have undisputed control of properties, a number of religious communities continue to meet significant obstacles when they request the return of religious buildings. The Jewish community, which has met with some success on communal property restitution, faces the same obstacles as other religious communities and has concerns about the return of Torah scrolls, many of which are in state museum collections. The federal

Government turned over 61 Torah scrolls to the Jewish community in May 2000.

Land problems are handled similarly when some religious communities seek to acquire land and necessary building permits for new religious structures. For example, since February 1999 local authorities in Omsk have not responded to the Mormons' request to lease land, although local church leaders are continuing their efforts to locate a site. Some Protestant faiths have suggested that the Russian Orthodox Church influences the Government regarding land allocated for churches of other faiths.

Governmental Abuses of Religious Freedom

Reports of harassment and punishment for religious belief or activity continue. Mormon missionaries throughout the country frequently are detained for brief periods or asked by local police to cease their activities, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing. The Word of Life Pentecostal church in Magadan continues to allege that members have been harassed and followed by persons suspected of being local agents of the Federal Security Service (FSB). An unregistered local Baptist congregation in the village of Chernyshevskiy in Sakha-Yakutiya complained that local authorities were harassing it. Church members reported that on May 5, 2000, local police officers and a fire safety inspector raided the apartment where the Church meets and gathered lists of church members. After the Church's pastor protested, he reportedly was brought to the police station for questioning. The local chief confirmed that police officers did visit the apartment as part of a fire-safety investigation but denied that there was any "incident" with church members. He believes the group is illegal because it has not registered (the congregation believes registration leads to unacceptable interference in church affairs), although the religion law does not require all groups to register officially. The group has been harassed before; in June 1999, local Chernyshevskiy police broke up a street-evangelism meeting, confiscated a tent, and detained three Baptists.

Catholic parishioners in Moscow have complained of excessive document checks by authorities, including a document check of attendees at a Sunday Mass. Catholic organizations have complained of excessive attention from authorities including the fire inspector and the Ministry of Interior. In June 2000, police in Tura in central Siberia threatened to arrest local Baptists if they continued to distribute free religious material outside of their place of worship. According to the local police chief, it is a crime for the group to distribute religious material because it is not a registered religious organization and such material may not be distributed outside of places of worship. While the Baptists were distributing Bibles and other religious material, Russian Orthodox parishioners and a local Orthodox priest protested and threatened to call the police. Later the police summoned the Baptists to the police station for questioning.

Human rights activists have claimed in the past that only 15 percent of

actual violations of religious freedom are reported, and it still appears that only a small percentage of actual incidents are reported to authorities or independent media. According to various sources, the majority of citizens, especially those living in the regions, are still skeptical about the protection of religious freedom and are reluctant to assert their rights due to fear of retaliation. Federal authorities did not take sufficient action to reverse discriminatory actions taken at the local level or to discipline those officials responsible. Federal authorities and Moscow human rights activists often have limited information about what is happening in the regions.

Some churches and NGO's are taking steps to teach church members how to assert their rights. For example, the Church of Scientology reported that its Russian members initially accepted without protest verbal harassment and intimidating inquiries by local residents and police. The Church subsequently educated its members on their rights under the law and worked to establish cooperative relations with local police officers, which led to a decrease in harassment.

In May 1999, assisted by religion law experts Anatoliy Pchelintsev and Vladimir Ryakhosvkiy, former judge Galina Pitkevich filed a case with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), claiming that her right to fair trial and her rights to freedom of thought and of expression under the European Convention on Human Rights had been violated. Pitkevich, a member of the charismatic church Living Faith, was fired from her job at the Noyabrsk city court of Yamalo-Nenets autonomous region, based on accusations that she used her position to attract new members to her faith. Some human rights groups believe the evidence was fabricated. The ECHR determined that she has not yet exhausted all legal remedies in Russia (a fundamental requirement for an ECHR ruling), but her lawyers are appealing the decision. Pitkevich, now a private lawyer, reportedly faces discrimination from former colleagues. The case of Nataliya Nikishchina, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses who lost custody of her son, allegedly based on religious discrimination, was returned in 1999 to Russian courts by the ECHR. In this case, Russia's Supreme Court overturned all previous rulings and ordered the case be heard again in a new court.

Lengthy investigations continue regarding a number of so-called "nontraditional" denominations. The Church of Scientology continued to experience registration problems. Originally registered in 1994, the Moscow Church of Scientology has applied 3 times for reregistration under the 1997 law, only to have the applications denied. As of mid-2000, the Church was applying a fourth time. The Moscow general procurator and approximately 70 individuals representing members of the FSB, Federal Tax Police, the local police, and other law enforcement organizations in April 1999 conducted a high-profile, 3-day raid on the Hubbard Humanitarian Center, which is affiliated with the Moscow Church of Scientology. This was the second such raid. It was undertaken in connection with charges by the Procurcacy that the Center was engaging in commercial enterprise without a license and had failed to pay taxes. Although the Center successfully reregistered as a social organization in 1997 in accordance with legal requirements that

such organizations reregister by July 1, 1999, a Moscow court subsequently invalidated the reregistration and ordered the Center to be liquidated, a verdict upheld by a higher court. However, by mid-2000 this had not taken place and the center continued to operate as a registered social organization. A separate case based on similar charges was initiated against the Center's director, Gennadiy Kudinov, who is also head of the Church. As of mid-2000, the courts had not determined which Moscow judge should have jurisdiction over the case. While court rulings were based on the law on social organizations, church officials believe that the ruling is part of a broader attack on the Church and its activities. The Magadan Word of Life Pentecostal Church reports that it still is being investigated on criminal and tax-related charges. The Church of Krishna Conscious, which has experienced rapid growth in recent years and is registered at the federal level, encountered difficulties in some regions, particularly in Krasnodar and other southern regions, as well in the Moscow region, where the authorities repeatedly have denied it permission to acquire land and the building permits for construction of a temple. Its activities are strongly opposed by elements of the Russian Orthodox Church.

There have been instances of the serious misuse of psychiatry by local officials reminiscent of Soviet-era abuses. The Independent Psychiatric Association of Russia, along with several human rights organizations, has criticized the use of psychiatry in "deprogramming" victims of "totalitarian sects." In such cases, authorities use pseudo-psychological and spiritual techniques to "treat" persons who have been members of new religious groups.

St. Petersburg authorities arbitrarily detained six Scientologists for psychiatric evaluation. In January in St. Petersburg, Vladimir Tretyak, leader of Sentuar (the local branch of the Church of Scientology), was accused by St. Petersburg chief psychiatrist Larisa Rubina of inflicting psychological damage on his coreligionists. On June 17, six members of Sentuar--Mikhail Dvorkin, Igor Zakrayev, Irina Shamarina, Svetlana Kruglova, Svetlana Pastushenkova, and Lyudmila Urzhumtseva--were hospitalized forcibly and underwent 3 weeks of criminal psychiatric investigation by order of Boris Larionov, procurator of the Vyborgskiy district of St. Petersburg. In televised remarks, Rubina reported their July 8 release and declared that the six were mentally competent. Rubina referred to the six as "the accused," despite the fact they were only witnesses in the criminal case against Tretyak.

While they generally have not been inhibited by the authorities in the free practice of their religion, Jews and Muslims continue to encounter prejudice and societal discrimination, and government authorities have been criticized for insufficient action to counter such prejudice (see Section II). Violently anti-Semitic remarks in national venues, such as those made by former Communist Duma Deputy and retired General Albert Makashov in October 1998 and February 1999, have not been repeated. Makashov's remarks, which blamed Jews for the 1998 financial crisis and called for their elimination, caused a public furor, but the Duma's Communists and their allies blocked a November 4, 1998 motion to censure him. Some Jewish groups report that the

Communists and a neo-Nazi group, the Russian National Unity (RNE), continue to use anti-Semitism as a political tool to build populist support. However, since the December 1999 Duma elections, the Communist Party's influence and support in the country has somewhat eroded. The RNE, which is active in a few regions, regularly calls for violence against other religious and ethnic groups as well, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims.

Krasnodar region governor Nikolay Kondratenko is well known for making anti-Semitic remarks. The governor's public speeches in the region often contained crude anti-Semitic remarks and stereotypes, and blame Jews and alleged Jewish conspiracies for the country's problems. Although some local residents have downplayed the effect of Kondratenko's open anti-Semitism, it appears that at least some of these persons practice a degree of self-censorship to avoid retaliation by local authorities.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on March 29, 2000, then-President-elect Putin approved an interagency plan to combat extremism and promote religious and ethnic tolerance. Broad in scope, the plan calls for a large number of interagency measures, such as the review of federal and regional legislation regarding extremism, required training for public officials on how to promote ethnic and religious tolerance, and the design of new educational materials for use in public educational institutions. Implementation of the plan, which is to be guided by an interagency commission on combating extremism, has not yet begun. This plan has attracted little public commentary so far. In a March 2000 open letter to members of the U.S. Congress released by the Kremlin press service, President Putin called anti-Semitism "an inadmissible display of aggressive nationalism incompatible with civilized society in Russia."

The federal Government reports that it has moved forward on other promised initiatives against extremism and anti-Semitism. In May 1999, the Moscow city duma adopted a law forbidding the distribution and display of Nazi symbols, and the Moscow regional duma passed similar legislation in June 1999. However, on September 2, 1999, the Nezavisimaya Gazeta newspaper reported that then-Moscow oblast governor Anatoliy Tyazhlov refused to sign the law, stating that the draft law threatened not only artistic and academic freedom of expression, but also freedom of religion, as swastikas are displayed by some religious groups. Regional duma members are working to redraft the law.

Federal and Dagestani authorities stepped up their pressure on what they label as the republic's "Wahhabi" Muslim community. After an incursion on August 7 by Chechen-backed Islamist guerrillas, Dagestan President Magomedali Magomedov declared that his government would take a harder line against "Wahhabism." In September Dagestan's parliament passed legislation that outlawed "Wahhabi" groups and other organizations it considered extremist. The Keston News Service reports that government and religious officials in several Dagestani districts have wrecked conservative Islamic mosques, suppressed religious

broadcasts, and harassed local conservative Islamic communities. According to press reports, federal and Dagestani forces have followed up their initial counterinsurgency efforts with attacks on Muslim villages that they consider to be "Wahhabi" and that refuse to register their religious communities and turn in their weapons.

On February 3, 1999, Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov declared Shari'a (Islamic law) to be in effect in the republic of Chechnya. Maskhadov signed several decrees stipulating that all local legislation be brought into line with the Koran and Shari'a regulations. Maskhadov ordered the Chechen legislature and the Council of Muftis to draft a constitution based on Shari'a within 1 month. The legislature also was stripped of its legislative functions and, on February 10, 1999, was replaced with a 34-member Shura that has responsibility for "consulting" with the republic's president. The Shura includes several prominent opposition leaders. According to one expert, the Shura created in Chechnya is not a traditional Muslim Shura run by religious men, but instead is a council of military men. The Shura is not known to have functioned since the beginning of the federal Government's military campaign in Chechnya in late 1999.

Apart from the 3-week detention and involuntary psychiatric evaluation of six members of the Church of Scientology, there were no other reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

Forced Religious Conversions of Minor U.S. Citizens

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

Section II. Societal Attitudes

Relations between different religious groups are frequently tense, and there continue to be instances of religiously motivated violence.

Many Russians firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is at the heart of what it means to be Russian, and Russian Orthodoxy is considered in conservative nationalist circles as the de facto official religion of the country.

There is no large-scale movement to promote interfaith dialog, although on the local level different religious groups successfully collaborate on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialog. In addition, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Russian Pentecostal and Baptist organizations also have been reluctant to support ecumenism. Traditionally, the Russian Orthodox Church has pursued interfaith dialog with other Christians on the international level.

Muslims, who constitute approximately 10 percent of the population, continue to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas where they are a minority. According to press reports, on October 17, 1999, protesters in Volgograd successfully pressured the World Congress of Tatars to postpone a ceremony to lay a cornerstone for a new mosque. Chief Mufti Ravil Gainutdin reportedly stated that construction would be suspended until an agreement could be reached with local residents.

Over the last 4 years, there were many instances of violence in the north Caucasus, some of which had religious motivations. There was only one new report of violence against non-Muslim religious workers in Chechnya, apparently because very few or no workers remain. However, on August 14, 1999, a deacon of the Groznyy Baptist Church was kidnaped and held for ransom in Groznyy and another church member was kidnaped earlier that month. The threat of hostage taking, primarily for ransom, continues to be extremely high in the North Caucasus. There were no reports of developments in the case of religious affairs official Abuzar Sumbulatov, who, according to the Keston Institute in Groznyy, was kidnaped in 1999. No ransom was demanded, and Sumbulatov, known for his tolerant views on religion, is presumed dead. Kidnapings of Russian Orthodox and Baptist clergy in Chechnya and bordering areas in 1998 and 1999, according to Keston, suggested that Christians were being targeted specifically. The Russian Baptist Union advised its members in 1998 to leave Chechnya.

Following large-scale emigration over the last 2 decades, between 600,000 and 700,000 Jews remain in Russia (0.5 percent of the total population). While Jewish emigration rates are significantly lower than there were during the late Soviet period, the number of Jews leaving Russia for economic reasons and fear of persecution more than doubled in 1999, from 13,019 to 29,534, according to the Russian branch of the Jewish Agency. The vast majority of Jews (80 percent) live in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Jews continue to encounter societal discrimination, and government authorities have been criticized for insufficient action to counter it. However, in August 1999, the Ministry of Press, Television, Radio Broadcasting, and Mass Communications issued a warning to a city-owned television station in St. Petersburg for broadcasting anti-Semitic material in violation of the mass media law's prohibition on inciting racial violence or hatred. That same month, the St. Petersburg Commissioner for Human Rights, Mikhail Chulaki, publicly criticized the program that broadcast the anti-Semitic material.

Anti-Semitic themes continue to figure prominently in hundreds of extremist publications in Krasnodar and Samara regions, among others. However, traditionally anti-Semitic publications with a large distribution, such as the newspaper *Zavtra*, while still pursuing anti-Semitic themes, such as portraying Russian Oligarchs as exclusively Jewish, appear to be more careful than in the past about using crude anti-Semitic language. Some Jewish groups believe that the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) uses anti-Semitism as a political tool to build populist support, which is seen by many to be

decreasing.

Observers in the country and abroad are assessing whether anti-Semitic rhetoric represents a sustained pattern of intensified anti-Semitism. There were several reports of major crimes or acts of intimidation linked to anti-Semitic groups or motives in the early months of the period covered by this report. However, the number of anti-Semitic incidents reportedly decreased beginning in the fall of 1999. Observers differ as to whether these incidents represent an increase in violence, but human rights proponents agree that anti-Semitism remains a very serious societal problem and that the Government and civil society must continue to build institutions to protect the rights of religious minorities.

On July 13, 1999, Jewish Cultural Center director Leopold Kaymovskiy was wounded severely in a knife attack in his office at the Moscow Choral Synagogue. Kaymovskiy's attacker, 20-year-old Nikita Krivchun, said that he acted alone and that he considered Jews "evil." Krivchun was charged with attempted murder for reasons of national, racial, or religious hatred, and subsequently was declared mentally incompetent and placed in a psychiatric institution. Initial press reports quoted statements by Krivchun implying that he belonged to an anti-Semitic group, but investigators did not uncover evidence of such a connection and made no other arrests. On July 25, 1999, a bomb was found in the Bolshaya Bronnaya Lubavitcher synagogue. The bomb was removed by synagogue workers and later detonated by the FSB, causing some damage to the synagogue. Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov criticized the bombing and attended a July 29, 1999 service at the synagogue. The FSB is investigating the bomb as a terrorist act, but has made no arrests in the case. Vandals desecrated six Jewish graves in Tomsk on August 2, 1999. Also, on August 2, 1999, then-President Yeltsin told visiting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak that the Government would prosecute anti-Semitic crimes and proposed Israeli-Russian cooperation in combating anti-Semitism. No progress was reported in investigations of two May 1999 bombings near the Moscow Choral Synagogue, the May 1998 bombing of the Marina Roshcha Synagogue in Moscow, the vandalism of synagogues in Novosibirsk and in Birobidjan in early 1999, or the May 1998 desecration of 149 Jewish graves in Irkutsk. There was a more positive outcome to the June 5, 2000 incident in which some 40 gravestones in the Jewish part of a cemetery in Nizhnii Novgorod were destroyed. The teenage vandals were quickly captured by local police, and they and their parents were required to work with their children to help clean up the cemetery.

The ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity (RNE) paramilitary organization, led by Aleksandr Barkashov, claims to have extended its presence beyond its southern Russian stronghold since 1998. However, the party has remained a fairly marginal political force in regional and national politics. Although reliable figures on its membership are not available, in what is most likely an exaggeration, the RNE claims a membership of 50,000 persons in 24 federation chapters. At least one RNE member has been elected to a local administration (in Saratov) and, according to press accounts, the RNE has representatives in regional governments in Kostroma and Vladimir,

Tver and Samara oblasts provide resources for RNE youth groups, and, in Voronezh, RNE members patrol the streets with local militias. According to press sources, these joint street patrols failed in Kostroma and Yekaterinburg, where RNE members turned them into opportunities for petty crime, causing local authorities to cancel the programs. RNE "uniformed" members were visible in 1999 at political and cultural public gatherings, but their day-to-day visibility on the streets and in public areas of Moscow has not been obvious since a march in January 1999.

The increased visibility of the RNE and other extremists across the country prompted government efforts to address the problem of extremism more forcefully in 1998 and 1999. Moscow authorities banned the RNE from convening a congress in December 1998, citing the RNE's lack of credentials as a legally registered public organization at the time. (The Ministry of Justice twice denied the RNE's registration.) The RNE subsequently managed to register, but then was stripped of its registration by a Moscow court in April 1999. However, some observers called the municipal prosecutor's case weak and motivated only by the desire of city authorities to ban the organization. Although an interagency plan to combat extremism and promote tolerance was signed by President Putin on March 29, 2000, many elements of the plan need further definition, and implementation of most of its concrete measures has yet to begin. Its potential impact cannot yet be gauged.

Krasnodar region governor Kondratenko regularly engages in anti-Semitic remarks (see Section I). A report issued in October 1997 by the human rights group Memorial criticized Krasnodar government officials for "encouraging radical nationalist groups," including the Cossacks, and "indirectly inciting them to violence" against ethnic minority groups in the area. Local government authorities have sanctioned patrols by Cossack paramilitary groups in the name of law enforcement. Such groups are not publicly accountable, and their activities have resulted in human rights abuses.

After his 1996 election, Kondratenko appointed Cossack "hetman" Vladimir Gromov as deputy governor of the region. In April 1997, Kondratenko and Gromov issued a resolution making Cossack groups subordinate to the regional rather than the federal Government, according to the Center for Human Rights Advocacy. According to media reports of statements by radical Cossack chieftain Ivan Bezguly, he has 44,000 Cossacks at his disposal ostensibly to enforce "law and order." Estimates of the total number of Cossacks in Krasnodar are as high as 300,000. The Cossacks' tactics appear designed to brutalize and intimidate the area's ethnic minorities and to bring about the group's stated goal of cleansing the area of all non-Slavic Russians. A 1999 joint report by Antifascist Youth Action, the Union of Societies of Soviet Jews, and the Moscow Helsinki Group states that Cossacks closely monitor local officials to ensure loyalty to Kondratenko. The extent or effectiveness of federal investigations of racial or ethnic provocations in Krasnodar is unknown. Nonetheless, the effect of Putin's regional reforms on such regions remains to be seen.

Despite legal registration, members of some religions, including some Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, continued to face discrimination in their ability to rent premises and conduct group activities (see Section I).

Occasionally opposition to the activities of religious groups came from other religious groups. For example, in July 1999, the Russian Orthodox Church diocese in Vladivostok asked the Primorskiy Kray prosecutor to examine the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and an offshoot group of Hare Krishnas. The diocese reportedly argued that the three groups were violating the religion law by using deceptive methods to recruit converts. Leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church also have criticized publicly the Catholic Church for proselytizing in regions where residents have been traditionally Orthodox. Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksii II charged in June 2000 that the Catholic Church was attempting to expand its influence into Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. From time to time, the Russian Orthodox Church has criticized the press for what it called "antichurch publications," but stopped short of imposing any church sanctions against particular authors or editors. However, the Church appealed to authors of what it considered inaccurate accounts of church history to "realize the sinfulness of their evil deeds." Religious groups frequently complain of biased accounts in local press outlets. While the overall scope of the problem is difficult to gauge, both regional and national newspapers have published sensational, biased, or libelous articles criticizing nontraditional religions, such as the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, the Church of Christ, and the Church of Scientology. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, a local Chelyabinsk television station broadcast prime time news reports in late 1999, accusing Jehovah's Witnesses of being an illegal organization of mentally ill persons who abuse children and possess nuclear and chemical weapons. Jehovah's Witnesses filed a libel suit, which was under way as of mid-2000. The defendants rejected an out-of-court settlement that would have permitted Jehovah's Witnesses a televised response to the programs. The court itself rejected a similar request by Jehovah's Witnesses.

As foreign or so-called nontraditional religions in the country continue to grow, many Russians, influenced by negative reports in the mass media and public criticism by Russian Orthodox Church officials and other influential figures, continue to exhibit hostility toward these "foreign sects." These sentiments apparently sparked occasional harassment and even physical attacks. For example, according to press reports, in August 1999, between 10 and 15 youths burst into a Moscow Hare Krishna temple, beat followers, and inflicted a severe head laceration on 1 person that require hospitalization. Mormons and Pentecostals have reported instances in which they may have been followed, harassed, and, in at least one case, physically struck. For example, on August 21, 1999, an anonymous bomb threat led to the evacuation of 15,000 persons attending a Jehovah's Witnesses convention in Moscow's Olympic Stadium (see Section I). There are believed to be more cases of such harassment than are reported. In

several instances during 1999, local press outlets accused Scientologists, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses of espionage, brainwashing, and other activities that they believed to be harmful to citizens. A political commentator for the ORT network alleged in a November 1999 broadcast that Moscow mayor Luzhkov is a Scientologist as part of the station's effort to reduce Luzhkov's party's chances in the December 1999 Duma elections.

In an August 1999 conference on spirituality at Moscow State University, Metropolitan Kirill, head of the Patriarchate's public relations department, voiced the view that international human rights standards do not apply to Russia, because they are based on Western standards, which do not take into account Eastern tradition.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Mission has been active in encouraging respect for religious freedom. Throughout the period covered by this report, the Embassy in Moscow and the Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok were active in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom, including anti-Semitic incidents. Working-level U.S. Government officials engage a broad range of government officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis. These contacts include: representatives of over 20 religious confessions; the Institute for Religion and Law; the Slavic Law and Justice Center; the Esther Legal Information Center; lawyers representing religious groups; journalists; academics; former and current government officials; and mainstream human rights activists long known for their commitment to religious freedom, such as Moscow Helsinki Group Chairman Lyudmila Alekseyeva, Father Gleb Yakunin, and former Duma Deputy Valeriy Borshchev.

The Embassy's political section uses a team approach to track religious issues, which involves the human rights officer, the rule-of-law officer, and the civil society officer (all of whose duties include religious affairs). This strategy allows the Embassy to offer a broad range of reporting and provide continuous coverage, even if one of the officers is absent. The Embassy's consular section, officers from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and representatives of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) regularly cooperate with the political section to gather information on religious freedom in the country. Embassy personnel of all sections and agencies travelling to the regions are encouraged to inquire into the local religious-freedom situation. Embassy officials at the chief of mission level discuss religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the Presidential Administration, the Government, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs approximately every 6 weeks, raising specific cases of concern. Federal officials have responded by investigating those cases and keeping embassy staff informed on issues they have raised. The Ambassador publicly criticized the attack on Jewish leader Leopold Kaymovskiy and the attempted bombing of the Bolshaya Bronnaya Synagogue, calling on the Government to investigate these crimes vigorously. Embassy representatives maintained close contact with Jewish leaders throughout

the aftermath of these two crises. After the attempted bombing, the Embassy's regional security officer also visited two other Lubavitcher synagogues to advise them on physical security. The Embassy closely followed and reported on the progress of the amendment to the 1997 religion law and related Constitutional Court rulings.

The Embassy and consulates also approach local officials at the working-level on individual religious freedom cases. For example, the Embassy played a role in resolving registration problems of two religious groups in Samara and Tatarstan, and is maintaining contact with Tatarstan authorities in an effort to resolve a third case. The Embassy and consulates also repeatedly have investigated and raised with federal and local authorities problems experienced by individual missionaries, including the refusal of Russian visas and registrations. As implementation of the 1997 religion law continues, the Embassy maintains semiweekly contact with working-level officials at the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In May 2000, an Embassy official attended a 4-day religion law seminar hosted by the Russian State Academy for Public Service, consulted with Russian and foreign religion law experts on the seminar results, and met with representatives of religious groups at a subsequent briefing organized by the Esther Legal Information Center.

In Washington as well as in Russia, the U.S. Government urges adherence to international standards of religious liberty in the Russian Federation. Officials in the State Department regularly meet with human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about religious tolerance in Russia. The Office of International Religious Freedom, headed by Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom Robert Seiple, has met with numerous visiting Russian officials, as well as with delegations representing various Russian religious groups. The 1997 law on religious freedom has been the subject of numerous high-level communications between representatives of the U.S. and Russian Governments, involving the President, the Vice President, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and other senior U.S. officials. For example, at the U.S.-Russia Summit held in Moscow on June 10-11, 2000, President Clinton discussed religious freedom in Russia in his meetings with President Putin and other government officials. On September 14, 1999, Ambassador-at-Large Stephen Sestanovich, Special Advisor to the Secretary of State for the New Independent States, co-chaired a roundtable meeting with representatives of religious communities at the State Department, together with Senator Gordon Smith, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Robert Seiple, and National Security Council Senior Director Carlos Pascual. On April 13, 2000, Ambassador Sestanovich co-chaired another roundtable discussion on religious freedom in Russia with Senator Smith, Ambassador Seiple, and NSC Senior Director Mark Medish. On May 22, 2000, in compliance with Section 567 of the fiscal year 2000 Foreign Operations Act, the Acting Secretary of State made a determination that the central authorities in Russia did not implement the law on religion in a manner intended to restrict the religious liberty of minority faiths. However, in the report to Congress that accompanied the Acting Secretary's determination, he noted that some local officials have used the 1997 law

to restrict citizens' rights. .

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