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China (includes Taiwan only)

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the authorities generally respect this right in practice.

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

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

The American Institute in Taiwan discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

Taiwan has a total area of approximately 13,892 square miles, and its population is approximately 23 million. While the authorities do not collect or independently verify statistics on religious affiliation, they maintain registration statistics voluntarily reported by the religious organizations. In 2003, statistics reported by registered organizations suggest that of the total population 7,600,000 (33 percent) were Taoist; 5,486,000 (23.9 percent) Buddhist; 791,000 (3.4 percent) I Kuan Tao; 605,000 (2.6 percent) Protestant; 279,232 (1.2 percent) Tien Ti Chiao (Heaven Emperor Religion); 200,000 (0.8 percent) Tien Te Chiao (Heaven Virtue Religion); 182,814 (0.7 percent) Roman Catholics; 182,000 (0.7 percent) practiced Li-ism; 152,500 (0.6 percent) Hsuan Yuan Chiao (Yellow Emperor Religion); 110,000 (0.4 percent) Maitreya Great Tao; 58,000 (0.2 percent) Sunni Muslim; and 30,000 (0.1 percent) Tien Li Chiao (Heaven Reason Religion).

In addition the Church of Scientology reported 16,000 members; the Baha'i Faith reported 16,000; Confucians reported 13,000; World Red Swastika Society reported 5,000; Zhonghua Sheng Chiao (Chinese Holy Religion) reported 3,200; Maitreya Emperor Religion reported 3,000; Hai Tzu Tao (Innocent Child Religion) reported 2,300; Ta I Chiao (Great Changes Religion) reported 1,000; Mahikari Religion reported 1,000; and Huang Chung (Yellow Middle) reported 850. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Secret Sect of Tibetan Lamaism (Mizong Buddhism), and Unification Church are also registered but did not provide membership statistics.

The non-Catholic Christian denominations include Presbyterians, True Jesus, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, Episcopalians, and Jehovah's Witnesses. There also are a small number of Jews. More than 70 percent of the indigenous population (Aborigines) are Christian. The majority of religious adherents either are Buddhist or Taoist, but many people consider themselves both Buddhist and Taoist. Approximately 50 percent of the population regularly participates in some form of organized religious practice. Almost 14 percent of the population is believed to be atheist.

In addition to practicing religion, many persons also follow a collection of beliefs that are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture that can be referred to as "traditional Chinese folk religion." These beliefs include, but are not limited to, shamanism, ancestor worship, magic, ghosts and other spirits, and aspects of animism. Such folk religion may overlap with an individual's belief in Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, or other traditional Chinese religions. There also may be an

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overlap between practitioners of such religions as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and practitioners of Falun Gong, which is registered as a civic rather than religious organization. Falun Gong membership has grown rapidly in recent years to as many as 300,000. Observers have estimated that as much as 80 percent of the population believes in some form of traditional folk religion.

Religious beliefs cross political and geographical lines. Members of the political leadership practice various faiths. Regardless of political affiliation, every year tens of thousands of Buddhists and Taoists from Taiwan go to mainland China on temple pilgrimages. Their mainland Chinese counterparts are also invited to participate in religious activities held in Taiwan, such as the annual festival of the Goddess of the Sea held in the third month on the lunar calendar. However, the number of mainland Chinese participants remains small because of travel restrictions between Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Foreign missionary groups, including Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, are active in Taiwan.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the authorities generally respect this right in practice. The authorities at all levels strive to protect this right in full and do not tolerate its abuse, either by the authorities or private actors. There is no state religion.

Although registration is not mandatory, 25 religious organizations have registered with the Religious Affairs Section of the Ministry of the Interior (MOI). Religious organizations may register with the central authorities through their island-wide associations under the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, or the chapter of the Civil Code that governs foundations and associations. While individual places of worship may register with local authorities, many choose not to register and operate as the personal property of their leaders. Registered organizations operate on a tax-free basis and are required to make annual reports of their financial operations. In the past, concern over abuse of tax-free privileges or other financial misdeeds occasionally prompted the authorities to deny registration to new religions whose doctrines were not clear; however, there were no reports that the authorities sought to deny registration to new religions during the period covered by this report. The only ramification for nonregistration is the forfeiture of the tax advantages that are available for religious organizations.

A draft religion law, which was proposed by various religious groups to replace the Temple Management Law, the Civic Organizations Law, and the chapter of the Civil Code governing religious foundations and associations, is pending in the Legislative Yuan.

Religious instruction is not permitted at the elementary, middle, or high school levels in public or private schools that have been accredited by the Ministry of Education. Religious organizations are permitted to operate schools, but religious instruction is not permitted in those schools. If the schools are not accredited formally by the Ministry of Education, they may provide religious instruction. Educational and government authorities have not used registration requirements as a pretext to restrict religious instruction. High schools may provide general courses in religious studies, and universities and research institutions have religious studies departments. Religious organizations operate theological seminaries.

Foreign missionary groups operate freely.

The Ministry of the Interior promotes interfaith understanding among religious groups by sponsoring symposiums or by helping defray the expenses of privately sponsored symposiums on religious issues. The MOI also publishes an introduction to major religious beliefs and groups in Taiwan based on material provided by the groups. In addition the MOI holds annual ceremonies to honor religious groups that have made contributions to public service, social welfare, and other activities that have promoted social harmony and served the underprivileged.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The authorities' policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There is no restriction on religious groups articulating political views or participating in political activities. During the campaign for the March 20 presidential election, some major Buddhist groups openly endorsed the opposition candidate. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has been active in politics, particularly in the pro-independence movement, and maintains contact with some elements of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party. The PRC Government has accused the Taiwan-based Falun Gong group of interfering with legitimate mainland China television satellite transmissions. The Taiwan authorities claimed to have investigated but said they found no evidence of these activities.

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. The Taiwan Council for Religion and Peace, the China Religious Believers Association, and the Taiwan Religious Association are private organizations that promote greater understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religions. These associations and various religious groups occasionally sponsor symposiums to promote mutual understanding. The Taiwan Conference on Religion and Peace sponsors summer seminars every year to help college students understand the practice of major religions in Taiwan. The seminar was not held in 2003 because of the outbreak of SARS in Asia. The seminar has been scheduled for August 27-29, 2004, at Catholic Fu Jen University in Taipei.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The American Institute in Taiwan discusses religious freedom issues with the authorities as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The American Institute in Taiwan is in frequent contact with representatives of human rights organizations and occasionally meets with leaders of various religious communities.

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