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Executive Summary

The constitution of the People's Republic of China states citizens enjoy "freedom of religious belief;" however, it limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" and does not define "normal." In the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas, authorities severely restricted religious freedom and engaged in widespread interference in religious practices, especially in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. There were reports of extrajudicial killings, prolonged detention without trial, torture, and arrests of individuals due to their religious practices. Travel restrictions also severely hindered traditional religious practices. Repression was severe and increased around politically sensitive events and religious anniversaries. Official interference in the practice of Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions continued to generate profound grievances. According to reports by journalists and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), 11 Tibetans, including monks, nuns, and laypersons, self-immolated. The government routinely denigrated the Dalai Lama, whom most Tibetan Buddhists venerate as a spiritual leader, and blamed the "Dalai [Lama] Clique" or other outside forces and foreign media reports for instigating the self-immolations and other protests against government practices. Authorities often justified official interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating them with separatism and pro-independence activities.

Tibetans encountered societal discrimination when seeking employment, engaging in business, or when traveling. Since religion and ethnicity are closely linked for most Tibetans, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

The United States recognizes the TAR and Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs) and counties in other provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China.

The U.S. government repeatedly pressed authorities at multiple levels to respect religious freedom for all faiths and to allow Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions. In February President Obama met with the Dalai Lama at the White House, where the President reiterated his strong support for the preservation of Tibet's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic traditions and the protection of human rights for Tibetans. The U.S. government raised individual cases and incidents with the Chinese government. Embassy and other U.S. officials urged the Chinese government to engage in constructive dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his

representatives, as well as to address the policies that threaten Tibet's distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic identity, which are major causes of grievances among Tibetans. The government denied nearly all requests by U.S. and foreign diplomats for permission to visit the TAR, although it granted one U.S. consular visit in late December.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to official data from China's most recent census in November 2010, 2,716,400 Tibetans make up 91 percent of the TAR's total population. Some experts, however, believe the number of ethnic Han Chinese and other non-Tibetans living there is underreported. Official census data show Tibetans constitute 1.8 percent of the total population of Gansu Province, 24.4 percent in Qinghai Province, 2.1 percent in Sichuan Province, and 0.3 percent in Yunnan Province.

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practices Bon, an indigenous religion, and very small minorities practice Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Some scholars estimate there are as many as 400,000 Bon followers across the Tibetan Plateau. Scholars also estimate there are up to 5,000 Tibetan Muslims and 700 Tibetan Catholics in the TAR. Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include ethnic Han Chinese, many of whom practice Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism), Daoism, Confucianism, or traditional folk religions, or profess atheism; Hui Muslims; and non-Tibetan Catholics and Protestants.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states citizens enjoy "freedom of religious belief," but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" and does not define "normal." The constitution bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion. The constitution states religious bodies and affairs are not to be "subject to any foreign control." The constitution also stipulates the right of citizens to believe in or not believe in any religion. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant), however, are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services.

The government's 2005 *White Paper on Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities* states, "Organs of self-government in autonomous areas, in accordance with the provisions of the constitution and relevant laws, respect and guarantee the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities and safeguard all legal and normal religious activities of people of ethnic minorities." Organs of self-government include governments of autonomous regions, prefectures, and counties.

Regulations issued by the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) codify government control over the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including reincarnate lamas. These regulations stipulate city governments and higher-level political entities may deny permission for a lama to be recognized as a reincarnate. Provincial or higher-level governments must approve reincarnations, and the State Council has the right to deny the recognition of reincarnations of high lamas of "especially great influence." The regulations also state no foreign organization or individual may interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within China. The government maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnate lamas.

Within the TAR, regulations issued by SARA assert state control over all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including religious venues, groups, and personnel. Through local regulations issued under the framework of the national-level Management Regulation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, governments of the TAR and other Tibetan areas control the registration of

monasteries, nunneries, and other Tibetan Buddhist religious centers. The TAR government has the right to deny any individual's application to take up religious orders. The regulations also require monks and nuns to obtain permission from officials in both the originating and receiving counties before traveling to other prefectures or county-level cities within the TAR to "practice their religion," engage in religious activities, study, or teach. Since 2011, Tibetan autonomous prefectures outside of the TAR have formulated similar regulations. TAR regulations also give the government formal control over the building and management of religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings.

At the national level, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee's Central Tibet Work Coordination Group, the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFW), and the SARA, with support from officially recognized Buddhist, Catholic, Islamic, and Protestant "patriotic religious associations," are responsible for developing religious management policies. At local levels, party leaders and branches of the UFW, SARA, and the Buddhist Association of China are required to coordinate implementation of religious policies in monasteries, and many have stationed party cadres and government officials in monasteries.

Government Practices

Government practices that severely infringed on religious freedom across the Tibetan Plateau included extrajudicial killings and the prolonged detention of people due to their religious practice, according to reports. In addition, official intimidation was often used to compel acquiescence with government regulations and to attempt to reduce the likelihood of anti-government demonstrations, projecting an image of stability and the appearance of popular support. At various times monasteries in the TAR and other Tibetan areas were surrounded by security forces. Police detained students, monks, laypersons, and others in many Tibetan areas who called for freedom, human rights, and religious liberty, or who expressed support for the Dalai Lama or solidarity with individuals who had self-immolated. Restrictions were particularly severe around politically and religiously sensitive anniversaries and events. Authorities heavily scrutinized and sought to control monastic operations and restricted travel for religious purposes.

There were reports authorities beat a monk to death. Authorities detained Tashi Paljor, a monk at Wenpo Monastery in the TAR's Qamdo (Chamdo) Prefecture, on February 28, for his alleged possession of politically sensitive writings and recordings by the Dalai Lama. He died after being severely beaten in custody, according to Radio Free Asia (RFA).

In December authorities released Tenzin Choedak, also known as Tenchoe, less than six years into a 15-year prison sentence for participating in protests in Lhasa in 2008. However, he died two days after his release because of the beatings and torture he suffered while in custody, according to media reports.

There were no reported arrests in the case of Geshe Ngawang Jamyang, whom, according to an RFA report, police beat to death in December 2013. Jamyang was a monk at Tarmoe Monastery in the TAR's Biru (Driru) County. According to the report, Jamyang's family members were warned that they too would be killed if they spread information about his death to outside contacts.

There were reports of prolonged detention without criminal charges, arrest, and the torture of individuals for their religious practice. For example, Norgay, who uses one name and is from the TAR's Dingri (Dhingri) County, was reportedly detained and tortured in January for possessing pictures and audio recordings of the Dalai Lama on his mobile phone. In August a court in Lhasa sentenced Tsultrim Nyendak, a monk at Rabten Monastery in the TAR's Biru (Driru) County, to nine years in prison after a secret trial convicted him of unknown charges, according to *Phayul*, a website based in India. Nyendak was held for more than seven months before his sentencing and, according to RFA, was tortured and is in poor health. According to the India-based Central

Tibetan Administration, in January a court in the TAR's Biru (Driru) County sentenced Thardoe Gyaltzen, the administrator of Drongna Monastery, to 18 years in prison for allegedly storing photos of and speeches by the Dalai Lama. On March 4, authorities arrested Lobsang Choejor, a senior Tibetan monk at the Drongsar Monastery in the TAR's Qamdo (Chamdo) Prefecture, because he allegedly used text and voice messaging services to disseminate the Dalai Lama's teachings, according to *Phayul*.

Some Tibetans continued to engage in self-immolation as a protest against government policies. At least 11 Tibetans reportedly self-immolated, a significantly smaller number than the 26 self-immolations reported in 2013. Some experts said the declining number of reported self-immolations was due to tightened controls by authorities. Local authorities prosecuted and imprisoned an unknown number of Tibetans whom authorities claimed had aided or instigated self-immolations. According to the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), through February at least 11 Tibetans were sentenced to prison terms or death on "intentional homicide" charges based on association with self-immolations since 2012. The same report listed 98 Tibetans who were subjected to punitive measures because of their alleged association with self-immolations since 2010. In November a court in Sichuan Province's Aba (Ngaba) County sentenced eight Tibetans, including Dolma Tso, to up to five years in prison on charges of murder for their alleged involvement in self-immolations, according to media reports. RFA reported Dolma Tso was sentenced to three years in prison because she lifted the charred body of Kunchok Tseten, who self-immolated in December 2013, into a vehicle. Authorities also reportedly took measures to limit news of self-immolations and other protests from spreading within Tibetan communities and beyond. In numerous cases, officials shut down or restricted local access to the internet and cellular phone services, according to reports.

Limited access to information about prisoners made it difficult to ascertain the exact number of Tibetan prisoners of religious conscience, determine the charges brought against them, or assess the extent and severity of abuses, including torture, that they suffered. The Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) Political Prisoner Database (PPD) reported records of 639 Tibetan political prisoners who had been detained by September 1, and who were believed or presumed to remain detained or imprisoned. Of the 639 political prisoners, 621 were detained on or after March 10, 2008, the start of a wave of political protests that spread across the Tibetan areas of China. Tibetan Buddhist monks, nuns, and teachers made up 44 percent, or 283 cases, of the 639.

According to the official Xinhua News Agency, there are more than 46,000 monks and nuns in the TAR, and about 100,000 Tibetan monks and nuns and 1,800 monasteries and nunneries in Tibetan areas outside of the TAR. In general controls were particularly tight at monasteries. Authorities often hindered Tibetan Buddhist monasteries from delivering the religious, educational, and medical services they traditionally provided to their communities or from carrying out environmental protection, a traditional element of both religious and conservation practice.

Authorities often justified official interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating them with separatism and pro-independence activities. General affairs in TAR monasteries, which in the past had been managed primarily by monks, were overseen by Monastery Management Committees and Monastic Government Working Groups, both of which are composed primarily of government officials and CCP members, together with a few carefully selected monks. Since 2011 China has established such groups in all monasteries in the TAR and in many major monasteries in other Tibetan areas. In accordance with official guidelines for monastery management, leadership of and membership in the various committees and working groups are restricted to "politically reliable, patriotic, and devoted monks, nuns, and party and government officials."

There were reports Chinese authorities forcibly removed monastery managers suspected of unpatriotic activities and replaced them with monks of their own choosing. According to RFA, normal religious and monastic group activities were ordered to cease at the Drongna, Tarmoe, and Rabten Monasteries in Driru County, TAR in December 2013. Many monks in these three monasteries who were not formally registered with the government were expelled during the year, according to reports. Authorities reportedly closed schools for young monks in Tibetan areas. According to RFA, authorities in Pema (Banma) County, Qinghai Province closed a private school for young monks in April and ordered its students to enroll in "mainstream" government-run schools.

Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments have stationed CCP cadres in, and established police stations or security offices on the premises of, or adjacent to, many monasteries. For example, the TAR had 1,787 monasteries and 6,575 government cadres working in such monasteries, according to a September report on the website of *China Daily*, a state-controlled newspaper. Security forces continued to block access to and from important monasteries during sensitive times. For example, a heavy police presence within and surrounding some monasteries in March restricted the movement of monks and prevented "unauthorized" visits, including by foreign diplomats, journalists, and other observers.

"Patriotic education" campaigns, in which authorities forced monks and nuns to participate in "legal education," denounce the Dalai Lama, study materials praising the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, and express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, were carried out periodically at many monasteries and nunneries across the Tibetan Plateau. In the past many monks and nuns reported that party and government activities, including "patriotic education" campaigns and "legal education" campaigns, detracted from their religious studies. Some monks and nuns fled their monasteries and nunneries because they faced expulsion for refusing to attend the education sessions and participate in forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama. Authorities also often publicly associated Tibetan Buddhist monasteries with "separatism" and pro-independence activism, and characterized disagreement with government religious policies as "seditious behavior."

According to many observers, the implementation of "patriotic education," coupled with strengthened controls over religious practice, including the permanent installation at many monasteries and nunneries of CCP and public security officials, were primary sources of discontent among Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns, and the impetus behind some of the self-immolations and protests. Senior monks at some monasteries outside of the TAR said they had reached informal agreements with local officials that resident monks would not stage protests or commit self-immolation as long as the government adopted a hands-off approach to the management of their monasteries.

Authorities restricted the number of monks and nuns in Tibetan areas. According to a temporary TAR regulation released in September, the TAR government would only recognize 1,000 new monks or nuns per year. Civil society representatives reported that officials in Qamdo (Chamdo) Prefecture occasionally forced novice monks and nuns younger than 18, unregistered monks and nuns, and monks and nuns who came from other areas to leave their monasteries and nunneries. Nevertheless, monasteries and nunneries in some areas routinely accepted minors and unregistered monks and nuns, including from distant areas. RFA reported authorities in the TAR's Jiangda (Jomda) County ordered residents to recall home any of their family members who were monks or nuns enrolled at Buddhist centers in other provinces, and those found noncompliant were threatened with withdrawal of all forms of government aid.

There were reports government officials had denied permission to build or operate religious institutions or facilities in some rural areas. In April authorities in Qinghai Province ordered the

destruction of prayer wheels at a clinic because they had "political implications," according to an RFA report. In October there were reports authorities in Biru (Driru) County, TAR ordered religious sites and shrines built after 2010 to be destroyed.

The TAR government also maintained tight control over the use of Tibetan Buddhist religious relics and declared the relics, as well as religious buildings and institutions themselves, to be state property.

The government continued to exercise its authority over the approval of reincarnations of Tibetan Buddhist lamas and the supervision of their education. In September *China Daily* reported the TAR had established a Leading Group for Identifying Tibetan Buddhist Reincarnate Lamas and released the Detailed Implementation Regulation for Tibetan Buddhist Reincarnation Management and Guiding Opinions for Identifying Tibetan Buddhist Reincarnations in order to prevent the "Dalai Clique" from influencing the process and ensure that the Communist Party controlled the reincarnation process. In addition, authorities closely supervised the education of many key young reincarnate lamas. In a major deviation from traditional custom, government officials, rather than religious leaders, managed the selection of the reincarnate lamas' religious and lay tutors in the TAR and some other Tibetan areas.

Although authorities permitted some traditional religious ceremonies and practices, including public manifestations of religious belief, they confined many religious activities to officially designated places of worship, often restricted or canceled religious festivals, at times forbade monks from traveling to villages to conduct religious ceremonies, and maintained tight control over the activities of religious leaders and religious gatherings of laypeople. The government suppressed religious activities it viewed as vehicles for political dissent.

According to the Norway-based Voice of Tibet, authorities in Sichuan Province's Aba (Ngaba) County compelled Kirti Monastery to cancel its annual winter debate session (Jang Gunchoe) and arrested Lobsang Kirti, a monk, on January 15. Lobsang was suspected of posting a letter on the monastery's premises that objected to government interference in the monastery's traditional religious activities. In July authorities in Sichuan Province's Ganzi (Kardze) Prefecture banned public gatherings of more than three Tibetan families, deployed security forces, and blocked electronic communications in order to prevent people from celebrating the Dalai Lama's 79th birthday, according to RFA.

Authorities permitted a major religious gathering, attended by over 100,000 people, at Tseo Monastery in Gansu Province in June, according to a report by *China News*, a state-controlled media outlet. On September 18, Xinhua News Agency also reported authorities allowed Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lamas in the TAR, to carry out a "longevity initiation," which attracted nearly 10,000 people. The last "longevity initiation" at Tashi Lhunpo Monastery was held in 1999.

The government prohibited monasteries from operating schools for children, although some monasteries outside of the TAR did so. Children were sometimes forcibly removed from schools attached to monasteries and enrolled in public schools or provided no alternative arrangements, according to local sources. Local authorities reportedly continuously pressured parents, especially those who were CCP members or government employees, to withdraw their own children, or the children of their relatives, from monasteries in their hometowns, from private schools attached to monasteries, or from Tibetan schools in India.

Authorities further strengthened controls along the country's borders, and Tibetans encountered substantial difficulties in traveling to India for religious purposes. Many Tibetans, including monks, nuns, and laypersons, sought to travel to India for religious purposes, including to seek audiences with the Dalai Lama, an important rite for Tibetan Buddhists, or to continue their

studies with key Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders and teachers. In many cases, Public Security Bureau officials refused to approve the passport applications of Tibetans. This was particularly true for Tibetan Buddhist religious personnel. In other cases, prospective travelers were able to obtain passports only after paying substantial bribes to local officials, or after promising not to travel to India or criticize the Chinese authorities while overseas. Some Tibetans attributed the passport restrictions to an official effort to hinder travel for religious purposes. There were instances in which authorities confiscated previously issued passports from Tibetans.

Authorities in the TAR reportedly told Tibetans who had previously attended Kalachakra Initiations, traditional Tibetan Buddhist ceremonies convened by the Dalai Lama, that they could not leave their home counties in July, when he convened another Kalachakra Initiation in India. They were required to report to their local police bureaus on a regular basis. Although many of the attendees had previously traveled to India legally, officials seized their passports to prevent their attendance at the most recent Kalachakra Initiations. Sources also reported the government had increased patrols along the Indian border to prevent Tibetans from crossing without permission. Rural officials in the TAR's Ngari Prefecture were reportedly required to stop rural villagers from crossing the Indian border to attend the Dalai Lama's Kalachakra Initiation held in early July. In addition to restricting foreign travel, authorities also restricted travel by Tibetans inside China, particularly for Tibetans living outside the TAR that wished to visit the TAR, such as for pilgrimage.

The traditional monastic system suffered because many top Buddhist teachers remained in exile in India and elsewhere, older teachers were not replaced, educated young monks were not promoted due to lack of political credentials, and those who remained in Tibetan areas outside of the TAR had difficulty securing permission to teach in the TAR, as well as other parts of China and abroad. Many monks expelled from their TAR monasteries after the 2008 Lhasa riots had still not returned, and some reported they had been prevented from joining new monasteries. The restrictions on movement hindered a key component of religious education within Tibetan Buddhism calling for nuns and monks to visit different monasteries and religious sites to receive specialized training from experts in theological traditions. Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns stated these restrictions have damaged and fragmented the quality of monastic education.

The government severely restricted contact between several important reincarnate lamas and the outside world. For example, the 11th Pawo Rinpoche, considered to be one of the highest lamas of the Karma Kagyu tradition, reportedly remained under official supervision at Nenang Monastery in the TAR. According to some Buddhist scholars, the Pawo Rinpoche was allowed to travel to some major cities to study Chinese but was not allowed to travel to Hong Kong or outside of China. The heads of most major schools of Tibetan Buddhism – including the Karmapa, Sakya Trizin, Taklung Tsetrul, Rinpoche, and Gyalwa Menri Trizin – all resided in exile.

In recent years several large monasteries began to use funds from the sale of entrance tickets or pilgrims' donations – and, in some cases, from monastery-run hotels, shops, and restaurants – for purposes other than support for monks engaged in full-time religious study, as such funds are intended to be used, in accordance with the government policy of monastery self-sufficiency. Although local government policies designed to attract tourists to religious sites provided some monasteries with extra income, such activities also reportedly interfered with and deflected time and energy from the monasteries' provision of traditional services, such as religious instruction and education, community medical care, and the performance of religious rites and ceremonies for the local Tibetan community. Sources reported security personnel targeted individuals in religious attire, particularly those from Nagqu (Nagchu) Prefecture in the TAR and Tibetan areas outside of the TAR, for arbitrary questioning on the streets of Lhasa and other cities and towns. Many Tibetan monks and nuns chose to wear non-religious garb to avoid such harassment when traveling outside of their monasteries and around the country.

Although many Tibetan government officials and CCP members are religious believers, the CCP continued to forbid its members from participating in religious activities. Gansu Province forbade government employees from attending a large religious ceremony held in the TAR in June, according to RFA. In March officials in some Tibetan areas in Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces were reportedly warned not to participate in religious activities, but the implementation of the order was less strict than in the TAR.

Multiple sources reported that open veneration of the Dalai Lama remained prohibited in almost all areas and that officials, many of whom considered the images to be symbols of opposition to the CCP and local officials, had removed pictures of the Dalai Lama from monasteries and private homes during visits by senior officials. Despite the ban on images of the Dalai Lama, many Tibetans continued to own and privately display photos of the Dalai Lama in their homes, in lockets, and on cellular telephones. The ability of Tibetans to display the Dalai Lama's picture varied regionally and with the political climate. In Tibetan areas outside the TAR, visitors saw pictures of the Dalai Lama prominently displayed in private homes, shops, and monasteries, although monks reported they would temporarily remove such photos during inspections by officials from the local Religious Affairs Bureau or other agencies. Government officials continued to publicly denigrate the Dalai Lama and accused the "Dalai Clique" and other outside forces of instigating Tibetan self-immolations, alleging such acts were attempts to split China. Authorities in the TAR continued to prohibit the registration of children's names that included parts of the Dalai Lama's name or names included on a list blessed by the Dalai Lama.

The government also continued to ban pictures of Gedun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the 11th Panchen Lama. His whereabouts remained unknown. The government ignored requests by international observers to visit Gedun Choekyi Nyima, who turned 25 years old on April 25, and continued to maintain his identification as the 11th Panchen Lama was "illegal." The government continued to insist Gyaltsen Norbu, whom it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama's true reincarnation. Gyaltsen Norbu has been appointed to two political positions, as vice president of the Buddhist Association of China and as a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. According to numerous Tibetan Buddhist monks and scholars in the country, United Front Work Department and Religious Affairs Bureau officials frequently pressured monks and laypeople, including government officials, to attend sessions presided by Gyaltsen Norbu. When Gyaltsen Norbu visited the TAR in August, officials reportedly ordered monks and villagers to greet him.

According to policy, government-subsidized housing units in Tibetan areas were constructed at new village sites near county government seats or along major roads, which often resulted in there being no nearby functioning monasteries where newly resettled villagers could worship. Traditionally, Tibetan villages were clustered around monasteries, which provided religious and other services to members of the community. Many Tibetans viewed such measures as illustrative of CCP and government efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities. In some cases Tibetans were able to build small temples near new villages after negotiating with the local authorities.

Several Christians in Lhasa reported officials had not significantly interfered with small house churches since 2011. The Lhasa-based Christians said both foreigners and TAR government officials had participated in services at Christian house churches.

With the exception of a few highly controlled trips, authorities did not allow international journalists to visit the TAR and other Tibetan areas.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Since ethnicity and religion are tightly intertwined for many Tibetan Buddhists, it was sometimes difficult to categorize incidents solely as ethnic or religious intolerance. Tibetans, particularly those who wore traditional and religious attire, regularly reported incidents in which they were denied hotel rooms, avoided by taxis, and/or discriminated against in employment opportunities or business transactions.

Many ethnic Han Buddhists were interested in Tibetan Buddhism and donated money to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries. Tibetan Buddhist monks frequently visited Chinese cities to provide religious instruction to ethnic Han Buddhists. In addition, a growing number of ethnic Han Buddhists visited Tibetan monasteries, although officials sometimes imposed restrictions that made it difficult for ethnic Han Buddhists to conduct long-term study at many monasteries in Tibetan areas.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government, including the White House, the Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu, made a sustained and concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas. U.S. officials at the most senior levels urged China to ease restrictions on religious freedom, including repressive policies in Tibetan areas. U.S. officials repeatedly raised Tibetan religious freedom issues in public remarks and with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels, including expressing concern for, and seeking further information about, individual cases and incidents of religious persecution and discrimination.

In February President Obama met with the Dalai Lama at the White House. After the meeting, the White House released a statement stating that President Obama reiterated his strong support for the preservation of Tibet's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic traditions and the protection of human rights for Tibetans. The State Department's Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues echoed these messages following a meeting with the Dalai Lama in India in November.

U.S. diplomats maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners in Tibetan areas to monitor the status of religious freedom, although travel and other restrictions made it difficult to visit and communicate with these individuals. Officials from the embassy in Beijing and the consulate general in Chengdu made several trips throughout the year to visit monasteries and nunneries in Sichuan, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan Provinces.

U.S. government officials submitted 12 requests for diplomatic access to the TAR, but only one was granted.

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