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Executive Summary

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, guaranteeing the right to worship and profess one's religion, but by law, officials may prohibit the activity of a religious association for violating public order or engaging in "extremist activity." The principal law on religion defines Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as the country's four "traditional" religions and recognizes the special role of the Russian Orthodox Church. The government generally did not restrict the activities of established Judeo-Christian religious groups, but imposed restrictions limiting the activities of minority religious groups. Government actions included detaining and imprisoning members of minority religious groups, and at least one case where individuals were reportedly threatened with cruel or degrading treatment if they refused to convert. Police conducted raids on minority religious groups in private homes and places of worship, confiscating religious publications and property. Authorities applied anti-extremism laws to revoke the registration of minority religious groups, refused to register certain religious organizations, and imposed restrictions that infringed on the practices of minority religious groups and their ability to purchase land, build places of worship, and obtain restitution of properties confiscated during the Soviet era. Although Jewish community leaders reported no official acts of anti-Semitism at the federal level, there were increasing reports throughout the year of cases of anti-Semitism by local government officials, as well as increased anti-Semitic statements in government-controlled media. The government granted privileges to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) that were accorded to no other religious group.

There were incidents of violence related to religion involving deaths and beatings. Rallies by nationalist groups were marked by anti-Semitic slogans, and there were increased cases of anti-Semitic statements by politicians, in the mainstream media, and on social media sites. Vandalism of synagogues, cemeteries, and mosques increased.

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officers met with a range of government officials to discuss the treatment of minority religious groups, the use of the law on extremism to restrict the activities of religious groups, and the revocation of registration of some religious organizations. The embassy engaged the four "traditional" religious groups, minority religious groups, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in a regular dialogue to promote interfaith cooperation and religious tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 142.5 million (July 2014 estimate). The *Atlas of Religions of Russia*, published by Sreda, an independent Russian research group, reports 42.5 percent of the population is Orthodox Christian and 6.5 percent Muslim. In contrast, a 2013 poll by the Levada Center, a nongovernmental research organization, reports 68 percent of Russians consider themselves Orthodox while 7 percent self-identify as Muslim. Religious groups constituting less than 5 percent of the population each include Buddhists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Bahais, Hare Krishnas, pagans, Tengrists, Scientologists, and Falun Gong adherents. The 2010 census estimates the number of Jews at 150,000; however, according to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, there may be 750,000 Jews, most of whom live in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Immigrants and migrant workers from Central Asia are mostly Muslim. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga Ural region and the North Caucasus. Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for religious freedom, stating citizens shall be guaranteed the right to freedom of conscience and to freedom of religious worship, including the right to "profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion, or to profess no religion." It also guarantees the right of citizens "to freely choose, possess, and disseminate religious or other beliefs, and to act in conformity with them" and says the state shall guarantee the equality of rights and liberties regardless of attitude to religion. The constitution also states that restrictions of the rights of citizens on religious grounds shall be forbidden.

By law the country is a secular state without a state religion, and all religious groups are equal. The preamble to the principal law on religion acknowledges Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism as the country's four "traditional" religions, constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage. The law also recognizes the "special contribution" of Russian Orthodox Christianity to the country's history and to the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture.

The law provides the right to profess, or not to profess, any religion, individually or with others; the right to spread religious and other convictions; and the right to act in accordance with those convictions. The government may restrict these rights only to the degree necessary to protect the constitutional structure and security of the government; the morality, health, rights, and legal interests of persons; or the defense of the country. It is a violation of the law to force another person to disclose his or her attitude toward religion, or to participate or not participate in worship, other religious ceremonies, the activities of a religious association, or religious instruction.

The law states that those who violate religious freedom will be "punished to the fullest extent possible," but does not specify the penalty nor under what circumstances it is to be imposed. The administrative violations code and the criminal code both punish obstruction of the right to freedom of conscience and belief with imprisonment for up to three years and fines of up to 100,000 rubles (\$1,704) or 500,000 rubles (\$8,521), depending upon which code governs the offense.

The law creates three categories of religious associations with different levels of legal status and privileges: groups, local organizations, and centralized organizations. Religious groups or organizations may be subject to legal dissolution or deprivation of legal status by a court decision on grounds including violations of standards set forth in the constitution and violation of public

security. According to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), there are 27,287 registered religious associations (including all three categories) operating in the country.

The "religious group" is the most basic unit. It has the right to conduct worship services and rituals and to teach religion to its members. Such groups do not have legal status to open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, receive tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, or the armed forces. Individual members of a group may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In principle, religious groups are able to rent public spaces and hold services.

A "local religious organization" (LRO) can register if it has at least 10 citizen members who are 18 or older and is either a branch of a centralized organization or has existed in the locality as a religious group for at least 15 years. LROs have legal status and may open bank accounts, own property, issue invitation letters to foreign guests, publish literature, receive tax benefits, and conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, and the armed forces.

"Centralized religious organizations" can register by combining at least three LROs of the same denomination. In addition to having the same legal rights as LROs, centralized organizations also have the right to open new LROs without a waiting period.

Foreign religious associations have the right to open offices for representation purposes as part of religious organizations previously established in the country. Foreign religious organizations may not form or found their own religious organizations in the country.

By law religious associations may not participate in political parties, political movements, or elections of government officials, or provide material or other aid to political groups. This restriction applies to religious organizations and not to individual members of the organizations.

Some provisions of the law dealing with public associations also apply to religious associations. The law grants the MOJ the authority to obtain certain documents from a religious association, send representatives (with advance notice) to attend the association's events, and conduct an annual review of compliance with the association's mission statement on file with the government. The law contains extensive reporting requirements. For example, each religious association must supply the full names, addresses, and passport details of members belonging to its governing body. Furthermore, the law requires details regarding the history, doctrine, and evolution of the religious association, including its attitudes toward family, marriage, and education. The government may obtain a court order to close those associations that do not comply.

By law officials may prohibit the activity of a religious association on grounds such as violating public order or engaging in "extremist activity." The anti-extremism law criminalizes a broad spectrum of activities, including incitement to "religious discord" and "assistance to extremism," but the law does not precisely define what is meant by extremism. The law includes no stipulation that threats of violence or acts of violence must accompany incitement to religious discord.

Within the MOJ, the Scientific Advisory Board reviews religious materials for extremism. Composed of academics and representatives of the four "traditional" religions, the board reviews materials referred by judicial and/or law enforcement authorities or by private citizens and/or organizations. If the board identifies material as "extremist," it issues a nonbinding advisory opinion, which is then published on the MOJ website and forwarded to the prosecutor's office for further investigation. In addition to the Scientific Advisory Board, regional experts also review religious materials for extremism.

Incitement to "religious discord" is punishable by up to four years in prison. Being a member of a banned group designated as extremist is punishable by up to six years in prison. According to the Code of Administrative Violations, distribution, issuance, and possession of extremist materials by private individuals can result in 15 days' imprisonment or a fine of 1,000 to 3,000 rubles (\$17 to \$51), as well as the confiscation of these materials. Fines for public officials for such activities are 2,000 to 5,000 rubles (\$34 to \$85). Courts may suspend for 90 days the operations of legal entities found to be in possession of extremist materials and fine them 50,000 to 100,000 rubles (\$852 to \$1,704).

By law publications declared extremist by a federal court are automatically added to the federal list of extremist materials. Courts order internet service providers to block access to websites containing materials listed on the federal list of extremist materials. There is no legal procedure for removal from the list even when a court declares an item is no longer classified as extremist.

Under the anti-extremism law, maximum fines and prison sentences for "actions directed to incite hatred or enmity" can be punished by fines of 100,000 to 300,000 rubles (\$1,704 to \$5,113), correctional work for up to one year, forced labor up to four years, or imprisonment for up to four years. If these actions are committed with violence or by a group of individuals, the punishment is 300,000 to 500,000 rubles (\$5,113 to \$8,521), correctional work from one year to two years, forced labor for up to five years, or imprisonment for up to five years.

A new law passed by the State Duma October 8, and signed by President Putin October 22, limits the list of places in which prayer and public religious observance can be conducted without prior approval. For the stated reason of maintaining public order, as with any other rally, protest, or demonstration, religious observances outside places defined as "structures belonging to religious organizations, land owned by religious organizations, and institutions of religious organizations" are subject to authorization by the government, including pre-approval of all slogans and materials and submission of the names of organizers and participants at least one week in advance of the event, and provision of police security.

Under the law an individual convicted of committing an act of vandalism motivated by religious hatred or enmity can be sentenced to up to three years of forced labor or prison.

According to a law that criminalizes offending the religious feelings of believers, actions "in public demonstrating clear disrespect for society and committed with the intent to insult the religious feelings of believers," are subject to fines of up to 300,000 rubles (\$5,113), forced labor for up to 240 hours, or imprisonment for up to one year. If these actions are committed in places of worship the punishment is a fine up to 500,000 rubles (\$8,521), forced labor for 480 hours, or a prison sentence of up to three years.

The law states that foreign citizens or stateless individuals whose presence on the territory of the Russian Federation is deemed undesirable, or whose activities are deemed either extremist by the courts or fall under the law on combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism, are forbidden to become founders, members, or participants of religious organizations.

Local laws in the regions of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan ban "extremist Islamic Wahhabism."

The government's nonimmigrant visa rules allow religious workers to spend no more than 90 of every 180 days in the country.

Republics in the North Caucasus have varying policies on wearing the hijab in public schools. Hijabs are banned in public schools in Stavropol, while in Chechnya, the law requires women to wear a hijab in all public spaces and buildings.

The ROC and all members of the Public Chamber (a state institution made up of representatives of public associations) who represent "traditional" religions are allowed to review draft legislation pending before the State Duma.

Religious education classes are compulsory in all secondary schools, including public schools. Students may take a course on one of the four "traditional" religions, a general world religions course, or a secular ethics course. Regional and municipal departments of education implement this curriculum at the local level in accordance with their capacity to offer the courses, and according to the religious makeup of the given location.

A Ministry of Defense chaplaincy program requires a religious group to comprise at least 10 percent of a military unit for an official chaplain of that group to be appointed. Chaplains are not enlisted or commissioned, but are assistants to the commander. Chaplains are full-time employees of the Ministry of Defense, paid out of the defense budget. The program allows for chaplains from the four "traditional" religions, and calls for at least 250 chaplains.

The Office of the Director of Religious Issues within the Office of the Federal Human Rights Ombudsman handles complaints dealing with religious freedom. The ombudsman can intercede on behalf of those who submit complaints, but cannot compel other government bodies to act.

The law entitles individuals and organizations to take religious freedom cases to the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg, which bases its rulings on the European Convention on Human Rights. According to the Constitutional Court, "decisions by the ECHR are binding for Russia. The State must pay compensation to a person whose rights were violated as determined by the European Court and ensure his/her rights are restored as far as possible."

There is compulsory military service for men, but the constitution provides for alternative service for those who refuse to bear arms for reasons of conscience. The standard military service period is 12 months, while alternative service is 18 months in a Ministry of Defense agency and 21 months in a non-defense agency.

The law on the Transfer of Religious Property to Religious Organizations allows the transfer of property of religious significance to religious organizations, including land, buildings, and movable property. The law grants religious organizations ownership of all state historical property they use. Under the law's provisions, religious organizations have the right to use such state property indefinitely.

Government Practices

Government authorities detained and imprisoned members of minority religions. Government authorities reportedly threatened inmates of one penal colony with inhumane treatment if they did not convert to Christianity. Police conducted raids against the private homes and places of worship of minority religious groups disrupting religious services and confiscating religious publications they deemed to be "extremist." Authorities acted to dissolve some minority religious groups or revoke their status, refused to register other religious organizations, and imposed a number of restrictions that infringed on the religious practices of minority religious groups, in particular Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, and Scientologists, including limiting their ability to obtain land, build places of worship, and obtain restitution of property seized during the Soviet era. Although the Federation of Jewish Communities reported no official acts of anti-Semitism at the federal level, there were increasing reports throughout the year of cases of anti-Semitism by local government officials as well as increased anti-Semitic statements in government-controlled media. The government granted privileges to the ROC that were accorded to no other religious group.

On August 16, families of Muslim inmates in Penal Colony 8, in Labytnangy, Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug – Ugra reported that inmates were held in a barracks and threatened with being set on fire if they did not convert to Christianity. Following a visit to the colony later that month by representatives from the local prosecutor's office and the Yamalo-Nenets Kray Human Rights ombudsman, the inmates retracted all statements about the conditions of their incarceration and any threats they faced. There was no further information available about the case as of year's end.

Also in September police in Moscow arrested 30 Muslim worshipers following Friday prayers, alleging the individuals had attacked the police after the police arrested a man coming out of a nearby mosque. The worshipers said they had attempted to free a friend from a police vehicle, saying he had been wrongfully arrested. Two individuals among the worshipers were charged with using violence to threaten an officer's life, and were imprisoned for two months during the investigation period. On December 10, the Zamoskvoretskiy District Court of Moscow sentenced one of the individuals, Adam Oskanov, to one year in a penal colony. The detention of the other individual, Magomed Tochiyev, was extended until December 24. At year's end, no information existed on developments in his case.

In October the Kirov District Court of St. Petersburg extended the detention of three Muslims being held on suspicion they had collaborated with the international pan-Islamic political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir. The suspects were arrested in June and were accused of collaborating with a terrorist and extremist organization.

In September a court in the Ulyanovsk region found a local Muslim resident guilty under the anti-extremism law of inciting hatred via social media against the lifestyle and traditions of the Russian people. He was sentenced to 300 hours of compulsory labor.

In December the Rostov Regional Court reversed the judgment of the court of first instance in the case of 16 Jehovah's Witnesses from Taganrog and ordered a retrial. In July the Taganrog City Court had convicted and sentenced seven of the 16 Jehovah's Witnesses for organizing and attending illegal religious meetings. The judge sentenced four congregation elders to five-and-a-half-year suspended prison terms, but waived any fines, which in some cases would have exceeded 100,000 rubles (\$1,704), because the investigation and trial had exceeded the statute of limitations on the length of time to bring a case to trial. The convictions were based on a 2009 decision by the Rostov Regional Court to dissolve the Jehovah's Witnesses LRO in Taganrog, saying it was an extremist organization. Although the 2009 ruling officially had affected the group only as a legal entity, the Taganrog City Court judge determined that ruling had also banned the religious activity of all Jehovah's Witnesses in Taganrog and surrounding districts. The remaining nine Jehovah's Witnesses were acquitted.

The federal government continued to ban Nurjular, which the government defined as a religious association of followers of Sunni Muslim theologian Said Nursi. The federal government based its ban on its assessment that Nursi's works were extremist and promoted intolerance. Muslim adherents of Nursi (generally referred to as "Nursi readers") and religious rights advocates continued to state there was no Nurjular organization. In January Andrei Dedkov was detained in Krasnoyarsk on suspicion of organizing Nurjular activities. He was accused of recruiting citizens to participate in an extremist organization and distributing banned literature designed to incite religious strife. As of year's end, no information existed on whether the case would be brought to court.

In March Nakiya Sharifullina and Laura Khapinova were found guilty of involvement in extremist activities and were fined 100,000 (\$1,704) and 50,000 rubles (\$852), respectively, for participating in Nurjular. Sharifullina had received a warning from the prosecutor's office in

Naberezhnye Chelny in January for organizing an "underground madrassah" for women to study Nursi's works. The warning stated that she would be prosecuted if she failed to cease illegal activity. The two women requested an appeal of their convictions in April but as of year's end, no date had been set for a hearing. In August a Tatarstan court rejected the prosecutor's suit to declare an additional 18 Said Nursi books extremist, on the grounds the police had already burned them. Police claimed not to have received a court decision ordering the return of the books to Sharifullina.

In June two women from Krasnoyarsk, Yelena Gerasimova and Tatyana Guzenk, faced criminal trials for their alleged participation in Nurjular and were indicted for alleged extremist activity. No further information was available on this case at year's end.

Some regional officials used contradictions between federal and local laws and varying interpretations of the law to restrict the activities of minority religious groups. In October authorities in Sochi fined the leader of the religious group Christian Community, Alex Kolyasnikov, 30,000 rubles (\$511) for hosting an unauthorized meeting in a public cafe. Kolyasnikov was found guilty of "violating the established order for organizing and/or holding meetings, rallies, demonstrations, marches, and pickets" under the law limiting the places in which prayer and public religious observance may be conducted without prior approval, despite Kolyasnikov's compliance with the part of the law allowing religious groups to rent public spaces for their activities. Prosecutors alleged that by holding the meeting, Kolyasnikov was violating fire and food safety codes for the cafe. Kolyasnikov's lawyers said there was no evidence to support this allegation.

Throughout the year, authorities attempted to dissolve a number of minority religious associations on grounds that they were conducting extremist activity.

In March the Supreme Court rejected an appeal by St. Petersburg's Harvest Pentecostal Church against its dissolution. The appeal followed the November 2013 St. Petersburg City Court decision to dissolve the church for engaging in educational activities without a license. The prosecutor's office brought the case to the court following an inspection for extremist activity. Protestant church-supported drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers in the Rostov-on-Don and Chelyabinsk regions also faced similar investigations and threats of closure.

In April the Samara Regional Prosecutor's Office filed an application to revoke the Jehovah's Witnesses LRO there on grounds of "extremist activity." In the lead-up to the regional court hearing, the prosecutor's office suspended the LRO's activities and temporarily seized its property. Following this, the MOJ immediately added the LRO to its list of religious associations whose activities had been suspended for extremist activity. In May the regional court ruled in favor of the prosecution and ordered the dissolution of the LRO. The Supreme Court upheld the lower court decision in a November 12 hearing.

On October 2, the ECHR ruled the 2006 refusal to register the Church of Scientology of St. Petersburg violated Articles 9 and 11 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The St. Petersburg district court had refused the registration, stating the group had not been in existence for the required 15 years.

On October 22, the Moscow city court suspended hearings on the dissolution of the Church of Scientology of Moscow. Among other issues, the MOJ had required the church to reregister its 1994 religious charter, while at the same time stating the government did not recognize the religious nature of the organization's activities. The church said it had already attempted to reregister 11 times and had been denied every time.

The government remained out of compliance with a 2009 ECHR ruling that the requirement for a religious group to have existed in a community for at least 15 years in order to be registered as an LRO violated the European Convention on Human Rights' provisions on the freedoms of religion and association. The MOJ admitted the requirement did not conform to the European convention and submitted a draft law to eliminate the requirement. The State Duma approved the first of three readings of the bill in early October. As of year's end, the Duma had made no further progress on the bill.

On February 11, the judicial board of the Vladimir Regional Court considered, then dismissed an appeal by the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) against the seizure of its 800-year-old saints' relics. In January 2013, the ROAC won its appeal of an arbitration court's decision to award the relics to the Federal Property Management Agency in Suzdal on the grounds that the general courts, and not the arbitration court, had jurisdiction. Despite this judgment, the court ordered the relics seized in order to "ensure the safety of the property."

In November a regional court in Vladimir ruled that a video on the case of the relics published by the online outlet Credo Portal was extremist. In October authorities in Vladimir had filed a lawsuit against Aleksandr Soldatov, founder of the independent religious website, who had produced a video showing police interrupting a church service to take possession of the relics while pushing Metropolitan Theodore away from the relics in the middle of a prayer. The ROAC said it was subject to systematic discrimination by authorities because of its refusal to acknowledge the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Authorities implemented measures restricting religious clothing in educational settings. On September 10, authorities at Moscow's Pirogov Medical University instituted a new order prohibiting national or religious clothing. Administration officials explained the measure was intended to introduce a uniform clothing standard for all university students. The order also banned clothing that might offend the religious feelings of others.

On September 12, prosecutors in Mordovia, despite objections from the Muslim community, instituted a ban on religious clothing, including headscarves, in schools.

Across the country, police with the support of local authorities conducted raids on minority religious groups, in private homes and places of worship, confiscating and destroying religious literature and other individual property. Religious minorities said local authorities utilized the country's anti-extremism laws to ban sacred and essential religious texts. As of November 1, the MOJ's list of extremist materials had grown to 2,500 titles, including 69 Jehovah's Witnesses items, four Falun Gong items, and seven Scientology items.

On December 3, the Supreme Court banned the official Jehovah's Witnesses website, reversing an earlier decision by the Tver Regional Court. The ruling pronounced the website to be extremist, required Russian internet service providers to block access to the site, and made accessing the site a criminal offense. According to lawyers for the Jehovah's Witnesses, the ruling marked the first time any country had legally banned the group's website. The earlier decision in January by the Tver regional court had been favorable to the Jehovah's Witnesses, overturning the original 2013 decision by a lower court to ban the website.

In July the prosecutor's office in Vladivostok carried out an inspection of the Church of Evangelical Baptist Christians that resulted in a 19,800-ruble (\$337) fine for fire safety violations and a 15-day detention for the church's pastor. Church members said authorities had been searching for extremist literature and cited the church for safety violations when they could find no evidence of any material that could be classified as extremist.

In August authorities in Primorye raided a mosque in Arzenyev and confiscated what they deemed to be extremist literature, including a book by Imam Muhyi-d-din Abu Zakayia entitled *Gardens of the Righteous*, which belonged to the "Islam" Muslim religious organization. This book had been put on the federal list of extremist materials by a verdict of the Leninsky District Court of the city of Orenburg in March 2012. The head of the religious organization was fined 2,000 rubles (\$34) for this administrative violation.

In August Russian special forces raided the premises of the Moscow-based Muslim Enlightenment Educational Foundation and House of Prayer, confiscating publications and detaining worshippers. The foundation's leadership stated that 108 pieces of print and electronic materials seized by agents containing texts such as *Essence of Islamic Jihad* had been planted there by authorities and had no connection with the activities or beliefs of the organization.

On September 11, Jehovah's Witness Aleksandr Yevdoshenko filed a second appeal against his June 27 conviction in Krasnoyarsk for mass distribution of extremist literature. The prosecutor's office in Krasnoyarsk brought charges against Yevdoshenko after nationalist Rodina Party official Ivan Nagovitsyn reported to the police that he had received a copy of the banned flyer *What does the Bible really teach?* while allegedly attending a worship service. Nagovitsyn, the chair of the Krasnoyarsk Rodina Party's Committee for Rehabilitating Victims of Sects, claimed on the party's website that his committee was "not only engaged with the collection and analysis of information on sects in our region, but is also entering into a fight with them."

On September 22, the Artinsky District Court in Sverdlovsk Region found an imam in the village of Ust-Manchazh guilty of disseminating extremist material. The court fined him and confiscated and destroyed the pamphlet in question, entitled *Fortress of the Muslim*, which in 2012 had been added to the federal list of extremist materials. The Muslim community in the region said the book was simply a collection of prayers, with no elements of extremism.

In October the district prosecutor's office in Yekaterinburg initiated criminal proceedings against a mosque following a search of its premises for the dissemination of extremist materials. Materials deemed extremist included brochures, books, films, and audio recordings currently on the federal list of extremist materials.

In February Chelyabinsk law enforcement officials inspected a Protestant-run drug and alcohol rehabilitation center in the village of Smolino, removed its beneficiaries, seized religious materials, and threatened criminal charges. According to a March 6 report on the website of the Interior Ministry for the Urals, the police and local Federal Security Service (FSB) were "continuing a set of measures aimed at collecting evidence and documenting the illegal activity of participants of the Exodus Church."

In August regional prosecutors shuttered the Muhammad the Great Prophet Muslim Scientific and Cultural Center in Khabarovsk following a search by regional FSB and Federal Migration Service officers. According to the authorities, the center was not a cultural entity but was teaching religion and conducting religious ceremonies without having registered as a religious entity with the MOJ.

On September 25, representatives from the St. Petersburg police anti-corruption unit and counter-extremism center searched the local offices of the Church of Scientology as part of a fraud investigation of St. Petersburg's Olimp Construction Company, which reportedly had financial ties to the Scientologists. The criminal investigation against Olimp began in early September.

Officials continued to prevent religious organizations from obtaining land and denied construction permits for houses of worship. In some cases, authorities also announced plans to demolish places of worship.

On January 22, Mufti Askarbii Kardanov of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Adygea and Krasnodar regions said lack of funding was the biggest obstacle to the construction of mosques across the region, including in Tuapse, Adler, and Novorossiysk. At the same time, the Krasnodar region government allotted more than 525 million rubles (\$8.9 million) from its budget for the construction of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Holy Image of Christ at the Olympic Village.

Officials established dedicated prayer rooms for Muslim athletes during the February Sochi Olympics in the absence of any mosques in the city, although it had an estimated population of 20,000 Muslims. Despite discussions in the lead-up to the Olympics about the construction of a mosque, none materialized.

In July the senior spokesperson for Russia's Council of Muftis, Gulnur Gaziyeveva, urged Moscow authorities to build more mosques in the city, which had four mosques for an estimated population of two million Muslims. Gaziyeveva stated more mosques would prevent the overcrowding of city streets on major holidays. He suggested 10 mosques be built in the city, one for each administrative district. The Moscow city government opposed the proposal.

In August the Muslim community in Kaliningrad, citing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, appealed to President Putin to reconsider a ban on the construction of a mosque in the south of the city. The appeal came following April district court and June regional court decisions prohibiting the building of a mosque.

In October members of the Muslim community in Belorechensky (Stavropol) stated they faced difficulties securing legal representation to contest a decision taken by local authorities in 2013 to demolish several mosques already under construction. In the absence of an attorney to represent them and in recognition of the passing of the deadline to file an official complaint against the demolition, the community sought the assistance of local mufti Mukhammad Haji Rakhimov in late October. As of year's end, there was no further information available on the status of the case.

In May the Krishna community lost its court case challenging the Moscow Property Department's unilateral termination of the lease for the land on which the community had planned to build a temple. The city government originally had approved a plan for the Krishna community to build a new temple on a plot of land in the sparsely populated outskirts of the city, after forcibly evicting the group from its centrally located temple in July 2013. Despite objections from both the federal and local human rights ombudsmen, the mayor's office, saying it had the right to terminate the contract unilaterally and unconditionally, withdrew permission after the Krishna community had already spent 70 million rubles (\$1.2 million) on the planning and construction of the new temple. The Krishna community was appealing the decision.

In June a Kaliningrad regional court upheld a March decision suspending the construction of a synagogue. The centrally located site had been leased to the Jewish community until 2016 to enable the reconstruction of a 19th century synagogue destroyed by Nazis in 1938. Although city authorities had not yet granted permission to build, construction work was begun in January 2013 and continued until the district court ruled work had to halt until a permit was issued. As of year's end, city authorities still had not issued a building permit, citing a discrepancy between two sets of plans regarding the number of stories for the structure. The city's Jewish community was pursuing its case over the suspension of construction with the Kaliningrad Regional Arbitration Court.

Restitution of religious property continued to be a challenge for several religious organizations.

In May Old Believers in Yekaterinburg appealed to the regional mayor for restitution of their church, which had been seized during the Soviet period. Despite a promise to include the property

in a June auction during which worshipers could repurchase it, officials removed the church from the auction list just before the auction occurred.

On May 21, a court refused Lutherans in Vyborg restitution of their former parish house, which they hoped to use as the pastor's accommodation and a Sunday school. The court ruled the intended purpose was not "religious" as required under the Law on the Transfer of Religious Property to Religious Organizations.

While neither the constitution nor the law accorded explicit privileges or advantages to the ROC, in practice the government cooperated more closely with the ROC than with other religious organizations.

The ROC continued to have a number of formal and informal agreements with government ministries giving it greater access than other religious organizations to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, police, and the military forces. The government also provided the Russian Orthodox patriarch with security guards and access to official vehicles, a privilege accorded no other religious organization. In June the ROC signed a cooperation agreement with the FSB's Border Control Department allowing Orthodox clergy greater access to members of the border organization to provide "spiritual support" to border guards during recruiting and training.

Ella Pamfilova was appointed Human Rights Ombudsman in March. The ombudsman's office received hundreds of complaints from religious organizations, mostly concerning anti-extremist legislation, allocation of land for construction of religious buildings, and evaluation of religious literature. While the previous Human Rights Ombudsman, Vladimir Lukin, had frequently interceded on behalf of complainants, Pamfilova had not made any public statements regarding religion-based cases, or religious freedom in general by the end of the year.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice and minority religious leaders continued to assert that local and municipal government officials and Orthodox religious organizations continued to use mass media and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religious groups, characterizing them as threats to physical, mental, and spiritual health and saying they threatened national security.

The Federation of Jewish Communities stated there were no official acts of anti-Semitism at the federal level. There were increasing reports, however, of anti-Semitic statements by local government officials and in the state-controlled media. In March St. Petersburg United Russia Party city councilman Vitaly Milonov, during a speech before the city's legislative council, stated that Jews "vilify any saint; it is in their tradition of 2,000 years, beginning with the appeals to crucify the Savior and ending with accusations of anti-Semitism against St. John of Kronstadt."

In March Evelina Zakamskaya, a news anchor of Rossiya24, one of Russia's largest state-controlled television channels, agreed with the arguments of nationalist author Aleksander Prokhanov, who stated that Jewish organizations in Ukraine that supported that country's new government "were ushering in a second Holocaust with their own hands... just as they ushered in the first one."

On May 21, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation in Orenburg filed a criminal case against a user of a Russian social media site (VKontakte) for inciting hatred and hostility toward Jews on his personal site. The user referenced the book *Igo Zhidovskoe (The Yiddish Yoke)*, which authorities stated contained language that conveyed a hostile attitude toward members of the Jewish community.

In another case involving VKontakte, authorities in Bashkortostan filed a criminal case June 10 against an individual accused of publishing anti-Semitic leaflets on his personal page that incited hatred and violence against Jews.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were incidents of violence related to religion involving deaths and beatings. Neo-Nazi groups chanted anti-Semitic slogans at nationalist rallies, and there were increased cases of anti-Semitic statements by politicians in the mainstream media and on social media sites. Vandalism of synagogues, cemeteries, and mosques also increased. Because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

An attack on an Orthodox Church in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk in February left a nun and a parishioner dead after a gunman opened fire in the church. The perpetrator, a 25-year-old security guard, admitted to the crime and stated that his motives for targeting the church were based on specific personal convictions. He was incarcerated while undergoing psychiatric evaluation.

In early December a Jewish student was badly beaten outside of a Jewish school in a Moscow suburb by three men using brass knuckles. The victim, hospitalized with his injuries, reported the men spoke to each other in a language other than Russian. On December 9, the Russian Jewish Congress issued a statement expressing "deep concern and dismay" and calling on law enforcement authorities to immediately pursue a criminal investigation. Police had not made any arrests as of the end of the year.

According to the SOVA Center, a nonprofit organization tracking extremism and racism, there were 92 acts of extremist violence recorded during the year, of which eight were directed toward religious groups.

There were a number of incidents of ultra-nationalists chanting anti-Semitic slogans at public rallies. Nationalist groups organized "Russian Marches" in over 80 cities throughout the country on National Unity Day, November 4. Approximately 2,000 nationalists participated in the "Russian March" in Moscow, with banners promoting the Nazi movement and chanting anti-Semitic slogans. The SOVA Center stated that the number of neo-Nazi groups was difficult to track because most had no more than 12 members; the center estimated there were 15,000 to 20,000 active members of neo-Nazi groups nationwide.

Activists and religious groups saying they had ties to the ROC disseminated publications casting minority religions in a negative light and threatening minority groups.

There was an increase in anti-Semitic remarks by politicians and articles published in the media.

On February 11, Oleg Bolychev, a Kaliningrad politician from the ruling United Russia party publicly called his opponents "Jews, hiding among the opposition," and said they were destroying the country.

Anti-Semitic postings on Russian social media increased during the year, with the re-emergence of the slur "*zhid*" ("*yid*") to describe Jewish oligarchs and opposition figures.

The social media site Vkontake had a page hosting a neo-Nazi beauty pageant, looking for "a woman Nazi" and "a woman who hates Jews" to submit photos and statements of their admiration for Hitler. The page reportedly had more than 7,000 followers before it was suspended by the site.

The SOVA Center reported 31 acts of vandalism motivated by religious, ethnic, or ideological hatred across the country. Acts of vandalism against religious sites included six against Jehovah's Witnesses' facilities, five attacks against Orthodox churches, four against mosques, and two against synagogues. Jewish organizations reported an increase in the number of anti-Semitic attacks on and vandalism of Jewish sites.

Synagogues, cemeteries, and mosques were the targets of desecration by vandals. In November vandals affixed neo-Nazi stickers on a synagogue in Perm. In October vandals wrote "Russia for Russians" on a mosque in Vladimir. In November vandals spray-painted the words "This is the lair of Zionists. Get out!" on the wall of the Center for the Study of Torah in central Moscow.

Through the Inter-Religious Council of the Russian Federation, an organization formed by the leaders of the country's four "traditional religions," the ROC maintained a cordial relationship with representatives of Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, the other "traditional" religions. The Christian Consultative Committee facilitated dialogue among religious organizations and with the government.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officers met with a range of government officials, including Human Rights Ombudsman Ella Pamfilova, to discuss religious freedom issues. Embassy officials raised consular cases involving possible violations of religious freedom of U.S. citizens with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They also met with representatives of the MOJ to discuss the law on extremism, registration of religious organizations, and the contents of the federal list of extremist material.

Embassy and other U.S. officials discussed religious freedom issues with the leaders of both "traditional" and minority religious groups. The Ambassador met with ROC Patriarch Kirill in November and Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the ROC's Department of External Relations, in September to discuss ROC-state relations, interfaith cooperation, bilateral relations, religion in society, and ways to promote religious tolerance. In December the Ambassador invited senior ROC representatives and leaders from other religious groups to meet a visiting delegation from the Orthodox Church of America at an event to encourage religious freedom and tolerance.

In October the Ambassador met Rabbi Berel Lazar, chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities, as well as Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, leader of the Moscow Jewish Religious Community, to discuss Judaism in Russia. The Ambassador also met with representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to discuss the Jewish community in Russia.

The embassy met with American missionaries and religious workers to inquire about the missionaries' experiences with immigration, registration, and police authorities, as well as with local populations, as a gauge of religious freedom.

In October the Ambassador hosted a concert with representatives from interfaith organizations and other religious figures, with the aim of facilitating dialogue. The event featured an American cantor from the 5th Avenue Synagogue in New York and celebrated the anniversary of the Jewish Men's Choir in Moscow.

In March embassy representatives attended the annual Russian National Prayer Breakfast, an interfaith gathering. Throughout the year, embassy representatives, as well as representatives from the Consulates in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Vladivostok, met with rabbis and leaders of the Jewish community, muftis, and other Islamic leaders, Protestant pastors, Catholic priests, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, Falun Gong adherents, Hare Krishnas, and

Buddhists. These discussions covered developments related to religion and religious freedom, including legislation, government practices, and specific religious freedom cases.

Embassy officers and other U.S. officials also met with civil society and human rights leaders on religious freedom issues, including legislation, government practices, and country-specific cases of religion and religious freedom. The groups included Forum 18, Portal-Credo, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, the Institute of Europe, and the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis.

Embassy and consulate staff conducted public outreach, advocacy, and training, and organized educational opportunities that sent Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives from Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, and Yekaterinburg to the United States in an effort to promote interfaith dialogue, including combatting anti-Islamic propaganda, as a means to build civil society.

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