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Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) grants residents freedom of religious belief, freedom to preach and participate in religious activities in public, and to pursue religious education. The law also protects religious assemblies and the rights of religious organizations to run schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions and to provide other social services.

There were no reports of significant societal actions affecting religious freedom.

The U.S. Consul General in Hong Kong and Macau engaged with government, religious, and civil society leaders on religious freedom. Consulate general staff stressed the importance of religious freedom in meetings with top Macau SAR officials.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 588,000 (July 2014 estimate). The Government Information Bureau of the Macau SAR reports that nearly 80 percent of the population practices Buddhism. There are approximately 29,700 Roman Catholics (of whom over half are foreign domestic workers and other expatriates residing in Macau) and more than 8,000 Protestants. Protestant denominations include the Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Pentecostal Churches. There are also evangelical groups and independent local churches. Macau's government reports smaller religious groups include Bahais (estimated at 2,500 persons), Muslims (estimated at 400 persons), and a small number of Falun Gong practitioners (estimated at 50 persons).

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The Macau Basic Law states, "Macau residents shall have freedom of religious belief, and freedom to preach and to conduct and participate in religious activities in public." The Basic Law further stipulates, "the government, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not

interfere in the internal affairs of religious groups or in the efforts of religious groups and their believers to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the Special Administrative Region."

These rights may be limited for national security reasons in extreme situations.

Under the Basic Law, the government of the Macau SAR, rather than the central government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), is charged with safeguarding religious freedom in the SAR. Religious groups coordinate their relations with coreligionists in the PRC through the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO). The CGLO also maintains dialogue with religious groups in the SAR.

The Basic Law's provisions are further delineated in a law that provides for freedom of religion, including privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education. The law further specifically guarantees that religious organizations may run seminaries and other schools, hospitals, and welfare institutions and provide other social services. Schools run by religious organizations may provide religious education. The law also guarantees religious organizations the right to acquire, use, dispose of, and inherit property.

The law allows religious groups to register directly with the Identification Bureau. Applicants must supply name, identification card number, contact information, group name, and a copy of the group's charter to register. Registration is not required to conduct religious activities, and it does not automatically confer tax-exempt status or other advantages.

The law also stipulates that religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. The local Catholic Church, which is in communion with the Vatican, recognizes the pope as its head. The Vatican appoints the bishop for the diocese.

Government Practices

The Macau government provided financial support, regardless of religious affiliation, for the establishment of schools, childcare centers, clinics, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation centers, and vocational training centers run by religious groups.

Religious groups could apply to media organizations and companies to use mass media (e.g., television or radio) to preach. No groups reported their applications were denied.

Some religious groups reported the CGLO supported their activities and exchanges with coreligionists in the mainland.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Relations among the various religious groups were good, and there were no reports of societal intolerance of religious views and practices. Many religious groups, including Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, and Bahais, provided extensive social services available to anyone regardless of his or her religious affiliation. Falun Gong members regularly set up informational sites in public venues without incident.

Public ceremonies and dedications often included prayers by both Christian and Buddhist groups.

The private University of Saint Joseph (formerly the Macau Inter-University Institute), which is affiliated with the Catholic University of Portugal, offered a Christian studies course that includes

Catholic seminary students from the mainland. The University of Macau's Philosophy and Religious Studies Program also accepted mainland students.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. consulate general affirmed U.S. government interest in the full protection of freedom of religion in meetings with the government and civil society leaders. Consulate officers at all levels, including the Consul General, stressed the importance of religious freedom in meetings with top Macau SAR officials.

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