

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	203
Land:	Rusland
Kilde:	U. S. Department of State
Titel:	International Religious Freedom Report 2009
Udgivet:	26. oktober 2009
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	14. januar 2010

Title	2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Russia
Publisher	United States Department of State
Country	Russian Federation
Publication Date	26 October 2009
Cite as	United States Department of State, <i>2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Russia</i> , 26 October 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ae861155.html [accessed 14 January 2010]

2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Russia

[Covers the period from July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009]

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. Although the Constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

Conditions remained largely the same for most religious groups, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. Some federal agencies, such as the Department of Non-Profit Organizations within the Ministry of Justice, and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of a few religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations" (the 1997 Law) continued to seriously disadvantage some religious groups viewed as non-traditional. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), treated the leadership of some Islamic and non-traditional groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses, as security threats.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Religious matters were not a source of social tension or problems for the large majority of citizens, but there were some problems between majority and minority groups. Prejudices against non-Orthodox religions were behind manifestations of anti-Semitism and occasional friction with non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Because xenophobia, racism, and religious bigotry are often intertwined, it was often difficult to discern the particular motivation for discrimination against members of religious groups. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) occasionally disseminated negative publications and held protest meetings against religious groups considered nontraditional, including alternative Orthodox congregations. Some ROC clergy publicly stated their opposition to any expansion of the presence of non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Some prominent societal leaders, including Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government engages a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy and consulates worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly supported the implementation of these programs. The Embassy and consulates maintained a broad range of contacts in

the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings to discuss the U.S. Government's concerns. Embassy officers looked into possible violations of religious freedom and discussed visa issues affecting religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in consultations with government officials, and other Department of State and U.S. government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 6,592,769 square miles and a population of 142 million. In practice, only a minority of citizens actively participated in any religion. Many who identified themselves as members of a religious group participated in religious life rarely or not at all. There is no single set of reliable statistics that breaks down the population by denomination, and the statistics below are compiled from government, polling, and religious group sources.

Approximately 100 million citizens identify themselves as Russian Orthodox. Muslims, with a population estimated between 10 million and 23 million, form the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga-Ural region and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations. There are an estimated one million Buddhists, the majority of whom live in the traditionally Buddhist regions of Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. According to the NGO Slavic Center for Law and Justice, Protestants make up the second largest group of Christian believers, with 3,500 registered organizations and more than 2 million followers. The Roman Catholic Church estimated that there are 600,000 Catholics, most of whom are not ethnic Russians. There are an estimated 250,000 Jews, the majority of whom live in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In some areas, such as Yakutiya and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or along with other religions.

According to a statement by a representative of the Ministry of Justice in May 2009, 23,078 religious organizations were registered as of January 1, 2009, 1,115 more than January 2008. In June 2008 these groups broke down as follows: Russian Orthodox (12,586), Muslim (3,815), Protestant (several denominations totaling 3,410), Jehovah's Witnesses (402), Jewish (286), Orthodox Old Believers (283), Roman Catholic (240), Buddhist (200), and other denominations. The majority of Russia's large economic immigrant population comes from Muslim countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups, most often through the registration process. The Constitution also provides for equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state; however, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

The 1997 Law declares all religions equal before the law, prohibits government interference in religion, and establishes simple registration procedures for religious groups. The country is by law a secular state without a state religion. The preamble to the 1997 Law, however, acknowledges Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions as constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage and also recognized the "special contribution" of Orthodoxy to the country's history and to the establishment and development of its spirituality and culture.

The Government of the Russian Federation observes Orthodox Christmas as a national holiday. Several regional governments, including majority-Muslim Chechnya and Tatarstan, celebrate other religious days as official holidays.

There is a universal military draft 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, alternative service in a Ministry of Defense agency is 18 months, and alternative service in a non-defense agency is 21 months. Some human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service for draftees requesting alternative assignments acts as a punishment for those who exercise their convictions. Students attending religious training institutions are not eligible for education deferrals from military service.

The 1997 Law creates three categories of religious communities with different levels of legal status and privileges: groups, local organizations, and centralized organizations.

The most basic unit is a "religious group," which has the right to conduct worship services and rituals and to teach religion to its members. A group is not registered with the Government and consequently does not have legal status to open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, or the armed forces. Individual members of a group, however, may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In principle, groups are thus able to rent public spaces and hold services, but in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encountered significant difficulty in doing so.

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

"Centralized religious organizations" can be registered by combining at least three local organizations of the same denomination. In addition to all the legal rights enjoyed by local organizations, centralized organizations also have the right to open new local organizations without any waiting period. Centralized organizations that have existed in the country for more than 50 years have the right to use the words "Russia" or "Russian" in their official names.

The 1997 Law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups and thereby prohibit all of the activities of a religious community. Following the passage of the law, groups that failed to re-register by December 31, 2000 became subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), i.e., deprivation of juridical status.

The 2006 Law on Public Associations (NGO Law) contains some provisions that apply to religious organizations. The April 2007 amendments to the NGO law simplified and eased the requirements for religious organizations. Although each organization must still supply full names, addresses, and passport details of members belonging to its governing body, they no longer have to provide details of religious congresses, conferences, or governing body meetings, including the number of participants. The accounting procedures have been significantly simplified. In April 2009 President Medvedev announced that the NGO law needed additional amendments in order to simplify requirements on NGOs and created a working group in May to propose changes. In July 2009, President Medvedev signed into law amendments approved by the State Duma and Federation Council simplifying registration and reporting requirements, particularly for small NGOs.

The NGO Law grants the Ministry of Justice the authority to obtain certain documents, send its representatives (with advance notice) to attend religious organization events, and conduct an annual review of the organization's compliance with its mission statement on file with the Government. Religious organizations are required to inform the Ministry of Justice of changes in leadership or address within three days of the changes taking effect. The required reporting includes information about "organized events and activities" and accounts of funds received from international and foreign

organizations, foreign citizens, and stateless persons. The NGO Law contains extensive annual reporting requirements. Small organizations especially complained about the time and effort needed to fulfill them, and denominations with many local organizations noted that compliance with these provisions for each local organization is highly burdensome. The law allows the Government to file suit against organizations that fail to comply, and if a court finds in favor of the Government, the organization may be required to close.

In accordance with Federal Law No. 160-FZ of July 23, 2008 entitled, "On Making Changes to Individual Russian Federation Legislative Acts in Connection With Improving the Implementation of the Russian Federation Government's Powers," the powers of determining the procedure for conducting state religious studies expertise were transferred to the Russian Ministry of Justice. Ministry Order Number 53 of February 18, 2009 established a Council of Experts for Conducting State Religious Studies Expert Analysis. This order came into legal force on March 31, 2009. Alexander Dvorkin was elected by his colleagues to head the Council of Experts. Dvorkin is an outspoken proponent of categorizing minority religious groups as extremist cults and "sects." His objectivity for an official position that makes recommendations on which religious groups should be registered is disputed by minority religious groups and international observers. The Council will determine the religious nature of an organization on the basis of its founding documents and information about the fundamentals of its dogma and its corresponding practice; verify and evaluate the authenticity of the information contained in documents submitted by a religious organization concerning the fundamentals of its dogma; and verify the conformity of the forms and methods of a religious organization's activity declared at the time of state registration with the forms and methods of its actual activity.

While neither the Constitution nor the 1997 Law accords explicit privileges or advantages to the four "traditional" religions, in practice the ROC cooperates more closely with the Government than do other religious groups. The ROC has entered into a number of formal and informal agreements with various government ministries that give the ROC greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, and the military. According to the Main Directorate for Educational Matters of the Armed Forces, as of April 2008 approximately 2,000 Orthodox priests served as voluntary military chaplains, 950 of them stationed permanently with a military detachment. As of February 2008, according to SOVA Center, out of 438 religious facilities in penitentiary institutions, 403 were Orthodox chapels, 23 mosques, seven Buddhist dugans, and three Roman Catholic chapels. ROC activities with the Government include support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones, holding religious services for those serving in conflict zones, and cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to combat extremism.

The ROC has special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Internal Affairs, and Emergency Situations and other bodies such as the Federal Tax Service, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces. Not all of the details of these agreements were accessible, but available information indicated that the ROC received preferential treatment.

Law enforcement officials, the ROC, and the legislative branches spoke of protecting the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include some Protestant and newer religious movements.

The 2009 National Security Concept of the Russian Federation states that "ensuring national security includes countering extremist activity by nationalist, religious, ethnic, and other organizations and structures directed at disrupting the Russian Federation's unity and territorial integrity and destabilizing the domestic political and social situation in the country."

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with

state authorities, and they may not conduct services or other religious activities until they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices opened without registering or were accredited to a registered religious organization.

In November 2007 the Moscow City Duma (legislature) removed "religious proselytizing in public" from the list of administrative offenses in the new Moscow City Code.

The regions of Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan have laws banning extremist Islamic "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups. According to the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus, three prayer rooms were closed in Nalchik, the region's capital, in 2004 for failure to comply with registration requirements. One prayer room was reopened in 2007, one now houses a district administration office, and the third remained closed.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities maintain consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and monitor application of the 1997 Law. At the national level, groups interact with a special governmental commission on religion that includes representatives from law enforcement bodies and government ministries. On broader policy questions, religious groups continued to deal with the Presidential Administration through the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations, chaired by the head of the Presidential Administration. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academic specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of traditional and major non-traditional groups. Other governmental bodies for religious affairs include a Governmental Commission for the Affairs of Religious Associations.

Religious organizations also may interact with regional and local authorities. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential Representatives (Polpreds) include suboffices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations. Religious minorities most often encounter problems at the regional level.

The Russian Academy of State Service, headed by Vladimir Yegorov, works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, to train regional and municipal officials in properly implementing the 1997 Law. The academy opens many of its conferences to international audiences.

The Office of the Federal Human Rights Ombudsman contains a department for religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints. The Ombudsman's Office received 500-700 religious freedom complaints in 2008, two to three times more than in the recent past. Many of the complaints allege multiple individual violations. The office estimated that approximately 75 percent of these complaints represented genuine violations of religious freedom rights guaranteed under the law.

Religious complaints constitute 5 percent of all complaints received by the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, according to the 2009 Human Rights Ombudsman report. One-fifth of these complaints are cases of impeding religious activities, and up to 15 percent involve refusals to return religious buildings or allot land for the construction of religious buildings. Up to 5 percent of applicants complain about persecution by law enforcement officials. The number of complaints related to issues of religious education and registration does not exceed 3 percent, but has grown steadily. In an April 2009 interview, Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin stated that in the latter half of 2008, the number of overall complaints to the Human Rights Ombudsman increased by 10 percent in comparison to the latter half of 2007. He attributed the increase to the financial crisis' impact on labor and housing problems in the country.

On July 4, 2008, the Duma adopted and the Federation Council approved amendments to certain federal laws intended "to improve the functioning of the Russian Government."

President Medvedev signed these amendments into law on July 23, 2008. Among other legislation, the amendments concerned the Federal Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, primarily changing the procedure of theological expert review at the regional level. The influence of expert councils depends to a great extent on their composition. As noted earlier, the Ministry of Justice named Aleksandr Dvorkin (an "expert on sects") as chair of its expert council.

Some regional officials used contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, to restrict the activities of religious minorities. According to many observers, local governments are more susceptible to pressure from the local religious majority and therefore more likely to discriminate against local minority religious communities. Many localities appeared to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the federal Government intervenes in local cases, it works through the Procuracy, Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and the courts. The federal Government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

The federal Government does not require religious instruction in schools, but it continues to allow public use of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. Religion is taught in Sunday schools, in public secondary schools, and in specialized religious schools (lyceums, gymnasias); the latter have the status of a secondary educational institution. Several regions offer a course on Orthodox Christianity in public schools. In practice students may be compelled to take this course where schools do not provide alternatives.

The Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation published statistics on religious education on August 29, 2008. In Belgorod Oblast (region), more than 140,000 school children of the region studied religion in 2007. Chechnya placed second in the number of students studying religion (more than 93,000), with Ingushetia having the third highest total (34,000). Seventeen regions, mostly in central and southern Russia, reported at least 1,000 pupils studying religion. These regions include Vladimir, Kaluga, Lipetsk, Pskov, Tambov, Tver, Tula, Rostov Oblasts, and Stavropol Kray. Other regions of this group are Tatarstan, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Taymyr and Dolgano-Nenets Autonomous Okrugs, as well as Omsk, Chita, Samara, Saratov, and Kaliningrad Oblasts.

In 35 regions (44.3 percent of the total number of regions), fewer than 1,000 students study religion. In 19 regions (12.7 percent), no religious courses are offered in secondary schools. Several autonomous okrugs and republics are among these regions, including: Koryak, Nenets, Chukotka, and Evenki Autonomous Okrugs, and Altay, Bashkortostan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Mordovia, North Ossetia, Tyva, and Khakassia Republics. Astrakhan, Volgograd, Krasnoyarsk Kray, Irkutsk, Novosibirsk, and Sakhalin Oblasts also fall into this latter category.

While there are more than 3,000 Sunday schools functioning in 79 regions of the Russian Federation, Orthodox Sunday schools account for 93 percent of the total (2,876 schools). The majority of these schools are in Moscow (625) and St. Petersburg (376). The Ministry counted more than 100 Islamic religious schools (50 in Samara Oblast, 20 in Kabardino-Balkaria, 17 in Tatarstan, 15 in Rostov, five in Chelyabinsk) and 78 Protestant Sunday schools (mostly in Murmansk, Leningrad Oblast, Sakhalin, and Chukhotka). The report added that 14 Roman Catholic, 11 Jewish, one Buddhist, and one Armenian Apostolic Sunday school operated in the country.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation announced on March 11, 2009, that it would send instructions to public high school students and their parents for completing upcoming religious education polls. Those surveyed will be given the following three religion course choices: Foundations of Orthodox Culture, A History of World Religions, or Foundations of Islam and Muslim Culture. The chosen subject will become a compulsory subject in the curriculum.

Some regions offer a class on "History of Religion," a proposal that the Minister of Education had suggested but did not introduce nationally. Although the Ministry of

Education rejected continued publication and dissemination of a controversial textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, some schools continued to use the text. The textbook contained descriptions of some religious groups that members of those groups found objectionable. The Congress of Religious Associations in the Tyumen region appealed to the Governor and regional department of education to allow input from other religious groups into the religious culture curriculum, claiming that the course currently contains only the viewpoint of the ROC.

The 2002 Law on Extremism, amended in July 2006, can affect religious groups, particularly Muslim groups, by criminalizing a broad spectrum of speech and activities.

The 2006 amendments allow charges of extremism where persons are alleged to have defended or expressed sympathy for individuals already charged with extremism.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government selectively enforced legal restrictions on religious freedom. Restrictions on religious freedom generally fall into four categories: registration of religious organizations, access to places of worship (including access to land and building permits), visas for foreign religious personnel, and government harassment of religious organizations or individuals. In the first three cases, religious communities rely upon government officials to grant them permission to assemble, own or build property, or allow persons into the country. While the individual cases are too numerous to mention, several examples in each category are detailed below.

Following the 1997 Law's registration deadline of December 31, 2001, the Ministry of Justice began to legally dissolve approximately 2,000 organizations that had not re-registered, sometimes despite complaints of groups who claimed they were still active. Complaints of involuntary dissolution decreased as this wave of dissolutions passed, and only a few were still being contested in court.

Many of the difficulties that religious communities face are rooted in bureaucratic obstacles and corruption, not religious bigotry. While it is nearly impossible to discern if groups are being targeted because of their religious beliefs or because they are vulnerable to demands by corrupt officials, the effect is a restriction on their ability to worship freely. In many cases, the problem lies not in the veracity of the government's charges, but in their uneven application by region and by religion.

In October 2008 the Ministry of Justice announced its intention to liquidate 56 religious organizations (including Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist groups) that had not submitted the appropriate documents for review. According to Forum 18, a respected international monitoring organization of religious freedom issues, several of the organizations noted in the Ministry's list challenged the warning successfully, while other organizations appeared to be inactive. As of November 28, 2008, only 19 organizations remained on the list of religious organizations proposed for liquidation.

Due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register. Some religious groups registered as social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations. Others operated without registering with the Government, meeting in members' homes.

As of April 2009 the Government had registered 409 Jehovah's Witnesses local organizations in 72 regions, but problems with registration in Moscow have continued since the organization's 2004 ban by the Moscow Golovinskiy Intermunicipal District Court and the Moscow City Appellate Court. The Moscow community appealed the ban to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and was waiting for the case to be heard at the end of the reporting period. The Jehovah's Witnesses alleged that in some cases authorities had consulted with the ROC in determining whether to approve their requests for registration.

Cases from Church of Scientology branches remain pending at the ECHR. Local authorities refused to register Scientology centers as religious organizations in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Since these centers have not existed for 15 years, they are legally ineligible to register as religious organizations and cannot perform religious services (although they were allowed to hold meetings and seminars). The Churches of Scientology in Surgut City and Nizhnekamsk (Tatarstan) filed suits with the ECHR contesting the refusal of officials to register the churches based on the 15-year rule. Despite these difficulties, the number of Church of Scientology groups operating in the country increased from 59 in April 2008 to 80 by the end of the reporting period.

According to the Ministry of Justice, as of January 1, 2009, there were 23,078 registered religious groups operating in the country, 55 per cent of which are affiliated with the ROC. In 2005 (the last year for which statistics are available), authorities investigated the activities of 3,526 religious organizations. The Ministry of Justice sent notifications of violations to 2,996 such organizations. The courts issued rulings to liquidate 59 local organizations for violations of constitutional norms and federal legislation during that period.

Many religious groups had difficulty acquiring land or permits to build houses of worship. Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities.

In the greater Moscow region, Muslim groups previously complained that they have been limited to only four official mosques that were established years ago.

As of April 29, there were 14 mosques and prayer houses in the Moscow region. Mosques opened in Kupavna in December 2008 and Balashikha in March 2009.

Moscow Region Muslim Community "Rakhman" Chairman Rustam Davydov stated in December 2008 that only 20 Muslim groups existed in the Moscow suburbs. In comparison, the Russian Orthodox Church had approximately 1,300 parishes across Moscow Oblast, while numerically smaller confessions such as the Protestants (320 parishes) and Baptists (60 parishes) also exceeded the Muslim community's total.

In January 2009 the mufti in Cherkessk reported that the mayor of Stavropol had not returned the centrally located mosque, as promised by the Yeltsin and Putin governments.

In contrast to previous reports that the Sochi mayor's office denied the Muslim community authorization to build a new mosque, credible reports in August 2008 indicated that a mosque will be built in Sochi before the 2014 Olympics.

Many non-traditional denominations frequently complained that they were unable to obtain venues for worship. Because they are small and often newly established, they typically lack the necessary resources to buy or rent facilities on the open market and must rely on government assistance. Because they are non-traditional, they frequently met opposition from the traditional communities and often were unable to find government officials willing to assist them with renting state-owned property. There were multiple reports of religious organizations who were not allowed to renew leases on public or private buildings. Representatives of numerous Protestant groups spoke about increasing difficulty in extending existing leases or signing new leases for worship premises, the majority of which are still state-controlled. Some religious groups reported that local authorities in recent years denied them permission to acquire land on which to construct places of worship. Authorities continued to deny construction permits to several groups.

Religious news sources claimed that authorities acting under the influence of the ROC sometimes prevented Orthodox churches not belonging to the ROC, including the True Orthodox, from obtaining or maintaining buildings for worship.

The Suzdal Diocese Office of the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) confirmed in February 2009 that the Federal Agency for State Property Management (Rosimushestvo) deprived it of 11 churches and two bell towers – including the ROAC's main church, Tsar Constantine Cathedral – in Suzdal, Vladimir Oblast, and its surrounding areas for failing to sign agreements of free use of the buildings. The ROAC appealed the decision at the First Court of Arbitration Appeals, which upheld the Oblast Arbitration Court's decision. The ROAC's lawyers challenged the decision, asserting that the use of the church buildings is under earlier "protection" agreements between the Church and the State Center in charge of keeping records concerning historical and cultural monuments, their use and restoration. The ROAC intends to appeal the decision once again at the Volgo-Vyatka Circuit Court of Arbitration. While attempting to remove religious objects from these churches in March 2009, ROAC officials were stopped by security service officials and prevented from removing them.

After the 1997 Law changed the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers, non-traditional religious groups reported problems receiving long-term visas. In October 2007 the Government introduced new visa rules that allow foreigners (including religious workers) with business or humanitarian visas to spend only 90 of every 180 days in the country. According to religious experts, these rules were not aimed at religious workers, but the effect has been to severely restrict religious groups that rely upon foreign religious workers. The Roman Catholic Church, which relies almost exclusively on priests from outside the country, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), with more than 300 foreign missionaries, have been particularly hard hit by this provision. While foreign religious workers seem able to acquire visas with few problems, the 90-day limit on their stay in the country limits their ability to work and significantly increases their expenses. Although registered religious organizations have the option to sponsor foreign workers and missionaries on work visas (which do not have 90-day or 180-day limits), this is a complicated process that places significant financial and administrative burdens on the organizations. Many organizations continued to report difficulties associated with the 2007 visa rules.

In November 2008 the Yaroslavl city administration published its "Guide to Sects," in which it labeled the Krishna Conscience Society (Hare Krishnas) a "dangerous totalitarian sect."

On June 18 Russian Orthodox Church Bishop Irinarch established by decree a Department of Religious Security and Assistance for the Victims of Destructive Cults and Sectarian Extremism in the dioceses of Perm. This bishop had previously spoken against religious tolerance programs in the region, saying that such programs open the way for "destructive sects" and their dangerous ideology to corrupt children.

Many religious groups were unable to regain property confiscated in the Soviet era or acquire new property. The Moscow-based SOVA Center said the property restitution problem was most prevalent among Muslim and Protestant groups.

Although authorities have returned many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, all four traditional religious groups continued to pursue restitution cases. In October 2007 a new federal law came into effect which specified the conditions and procedures for transferring ownership of state-owned land. The law allows religious organizations to retain their current land plots for unlimited use until January 1, 2010.

The ROC appeared to have greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still had disputed property claims, including claims to 30 properties in Moscow alone. The ROC continued to face property difficulties concerning the Yaroslavl Kremlin. All of the religious buildings at the Kremlin had been returned to the ROC by January 1, 2009, except the main cathedral. As of December 2008, the Moscow Patriarchate had 29,263 parishes and 804 monastic habitations (monasteries and nunneries).

In November 2008 ROC representatives delivered documents, signed by the Oblast

Minister of Culture, to the Old Believer community in Apeshino (Moscow Oblast) that approved the transfer of Old Believer property to the ROC. The documents stated that the Old Believer community had not complied with the Ministry's previously stated deadline for filing property ownership documentation.

Property claims by the ROC are legally complicated, since there was no separation of church and state before the revolution. Most of the Orthodox Church buildings that were returned to the ROC were not considered ROC property before 1917. The ROC was only entitled to use these buildings and theoretically could have been evicted, but there was no attempt to do so. The ROC fully owned only churches built, bought, or received after 1991.

The Roman Catholic community reported 44 disputed properties, including the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. While most state-owned property was returned, the community had no success with buildings that had been privatized. A Moscow Catholic leader stated that some issues had been resolved positively and that the Roman Catholic community would continue to work with authorities at the federal and local levels to resolve these issues.

The Jewish community was still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The Federation of Jewish Communities reported that federal officials and some regional officials had been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, although some Jewish groups asserted that the Government had returned only a small portion of the total properties confiscated during the Soviet period. The international Chabad Lubavitch organization repeatedly sought return of the Schneerson Collection, a large collection of revered religious books and documents of the Lubavitcher rebbes, which the authorities consider part of the country's cultural heritage.

Some human rights groups and religious minorities accused the Procurator General of encouraging legal action against a number of minority religions and of giving official support to materials that are biased against Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and others. There were credible reports that individuals within the federal security services and other law enforcement agencies harassed certain minority religious groups, investigated them for purported criminal activity and violations of tax laws, and pressured landlords to renege on contracts with those groups. In some cases the security services were thought to have influenced the Ministry of Justice to reject registration applications.

Four times a year, the Government updates a list of banned extremist publications. According to the SOVA Center, there has been a growing tendency toward prosecution for blasphemy under the umbrella of extremism. Those who publish or distribute the texts face a four-year prison term. The current list includes Islamic religious texts, a series of neo-pagan materials intolerant of other religions (Christianity in particular), and several texts that were explicitly racist or anti-Semitic. The SOVA Center noted in its annual report on xenophobia that "the federal list of extremist materials, whose quality is so poor that one cannot simply use it, is rapidly enlarging." Forum 18 reported in May 2009 that there are 367 items on the Federal List of Extremist Materials.

On April 21, 2009, the Meshchanskiy court in Moscow ruled the contents of Aleksey Ivanov's "Reply to the Patriarch" to be extremist. On April 23, 2009, Alexey Mikhailov, leader of the Patriot's Opinion club in Arkhanghelsk, went on trial for inciting hatred against Jews and other ethnic groups.

In February 2008 the Government added to the list of banned books the widely read *The Personality of a Muslim*, a moderate and pacifist work by Muhammad Ali al-Hashimi. The Chairman of the Council of Muftis, Ravil Gaynutdin, condemned the ban as a violation of the freedom of religious belief. In February 2008 a lawyer from Izhevsk filed a complaint with the ECHR protesting the ban on the Islamic religious book.

In May 2008 charges were initiated against Aslambek Ezhayev, the Director of the Islamic

publishing house "Umma" and head of the Publishing Department of the Moscow Islamic University, for inciting religious hatred by publishing *The Personality of a Muslim*. Authorities later dropped charges against Ezhayev for inciting religious hatred but instead charged him with violating article 146 (unlawful use of copyright items for the purpose of profiting from use of position of authority) and article 273 (use of harmful software) of the Criminal Code in March 2009.

Law enforcement officials often harassed members of religious organizations.

On February 1, 2009, an investigator and prosecutor's office representative in Asbest, a small town in Sverdlovsk Oblast, contacted a legal representative of Jehovah's Witnesses. He provided a list of the names of individuals who would be summoned for further questioning surrounding charges that the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation had distributed extremist literature. In March 2009 the Jehovah's Witnesses received unconfirmed reports that the Asbest City Prosecutor's Office had filed a claim to pronounce items of literature as extremist.

On February 7, 2008, the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Asbest was raided by police and the Federal Investigation Bureau, who inspected the premises and seized literature for further examination. In June 2008 the prosecutor petitioned the Asbest City Court to rule that the Jehovah's Witnesses' publications *Watchtower*, *Awake!* and *Draw Close to Jehovah* were extremist and filed criminal charges against the leaders of the local Jehovah's Witnesses organization. The prosecutor's office is still gathering evidence and questioning local congregation members in connection with the criminal case instigated on the basis of the distribution of so-called extremist literature by members of the congregation.

In January 2009 in Taganrog (Rostov Region), the Rostov Region Prosecutor's Office filed a claim with the Rostov Regional Court to liquidate the Taganrog local religious organization (LRO) of Jehovah's Witnesses for carrying out extremist activity. The court adjourned the hearing, pending the results of a complex commission expert study of Jehovah's Witness literature.

The Jehovah's Witnesses LRO in Shakhty received a notice and warning issued on August 11, 2008, ordering the LRO to stop engaging in extremist activity. After an appeal against the notice, the Prosecutor's Office stated that it was lawful and that there were no grounds for rescinding it. On October 17, 2008, the prosecutor's office responded to the appeal against the warning, stating that an expert study determined that the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses is extremist in nature and there were no grounds for rescinding the warning. In December 2008 FSB and police officials reportedly questioned congregation members on several occasions.

On July 16, 2008, the FSB conducted a search of a Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall in Yekaterinburg and seized religious literature. Eighteen individuals were unlawfully detained for up to nine hours in violation of Article 22 of the Russian Federation Constitution. According to Jehovah's Witnesses attorneys, the FSB agents psychologically and physically abused Anastasia Lelikova, pinning her to the wall and twisting her arms. All 18 individuals contested the lawfulness of the raid, using both civil and criminal procedures, but the complainants were refused access to court.

On July 15, 2008, V.V. Mitin complained to the Salsk (Rostov Region) Interdistrict Investigation Unit, Rostov Region Investigation Department, and the RF Prosecutor General's Office (SIU) that the literature distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses in Salsk contained signs of religious extremism because it preached the superiority of Jehovah's Witnesses over other religions and incited religious enmity. The 12 pieces of literature accompanying the complaint were sent by Investigator S.V. Gruzinov of the SIU to the Rostov Center for Court Expert Studies for linguistic examination. On December 8, 2008, the Salsk City Prosecutor's Office filed a claim with the Salsk City Court to have the literature declared extremist. Court hearings started on March 12 and in May the Court partially satisfied the prosecution's petition by demanding that the materials be examined by religious experts. Religious experts in Moscow analyzed these materials.

The proceedings were then suspended. The prosecution applied for revocation of this decision to the Rostov Oblast Court. On June 25 the Court granted this appeal and hearings were restarted.

At the end of the reporting period, seven court cases had been opened requesting a ban of Jehovah's Witnesses literature on grounds that it exemplified extremist content, and four court hearings were taking place in the Southern Federal Okrug – in the cities of Rostov-on-Don, Salsk (Rostov region), Krasnodar, and Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia.

From March 2009 to the end of the reporting period, three defense lawyers in extremism cases against Jehovah's Witnesses in the Southern Federal Okrug were deported from Russia.

The Government permitted Orthodox chaplains and priests broad access to military bases. Protestant groups were more limited in such access. The military has Orthodox Christian, Muslim, and Jewish chaplains. According to the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers, muftis expressed concern to Defense Minister Serdyukov that the military generally did not give Muslim conscripts time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Some army recruits reported that fellow servicemen insulted and abused them because they were Muslim.

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov continued to enforce the ban against women entering government institutions without headscarves. According to the SOVA Center, the regime in Chechnya has demonstrably been established as nonsecular.

According to the Slavic Law Center government officials in Elista, Republic of Kalmykia, threatened to take "extreme measures" against Seventh-day Adventists for not allowing their children to attend school on Saturdays. The commission brought charges against the Adventists and ruled that youth affairs officials should interview the children to determine why they did not attend school on Saturdays. After the interviews, officials reported to the commission that the parents had "terrified their children" into refusing Saturday classes. The Elista City Court fined each parent USD3.15 (100 rubles) in March 2009. On April 24, however, the Elista city court ruled that the Adventists were not liable to pay the fine.

In April 2009 the St. Petersburg Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) University, a training facility for future law enforcement leaders, removed 1,000 copies of a textbook containing anti-Semitic passages. The Russian and Soviet history textbook, written by two professors at the university, contained statements promoting theories on Jewish conspiracies against the Soviet Union. One passage claimed that former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev stated to the Israeli parliament in 1992, "everything I did to the Soviet Union, I did in the name of our God Moses." The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR) complained about the textbook and promised to launch its own investigation. The university subsequently fired the book's author, professor Vasiliy Drozhzhin.

On March 26, 2009, two tax inspectors from the Saint Petersburg Interdistrict Inspectorate of the Federal Tax Service informed Jehovah's Witnesses officials at the Administrative Center that they would resume tax inspection of the Administrative Center for up to four months. The inspectors also wished to view the residences of individuals living there.

On January 28, 2009, the FSB and the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Mordovia announced that they had shut down the activities of a Satanist sect founded and headed by a 24-year-old medical student. Officials claimed that the group distributed Satanist literature and performed "religious rituals accompanied by illegal actions, including alcohol marathons, sexual practices, and antisocial behavior." Officials initiated a criminal case, charging the student with organizing a union that encroached on citizens' rights. The court ordered law enforcement to take two members of the sect, including the leader, into custody on January 24, 2009.

A brochure written by Evgeny Gerasimenko and published by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) Institute for Raising Qualifications connected Judaism to Satanism, according to a January 21, 2009 report by the AEN news service. The brochure, entitled "Extremism: Understanding, Socio-Economic, Political, and Historical Roots, and Trends," was distributed to participants at a meeting of police officials charged with combating extremism and terrorism. The brochure states that "Satanism, much like Chasidism, arose from Judaism, specifically its secretive cruel and kabbalistic sects. Until the 18th century, it developed as a secret Jewish sect, but then broke off from Judaism and became one of Masonry's most influential currents. The core rituals of Satanic sects, like the preceding secretive cruel and kabbalistic Jewish sects, were blood rituals." According to the UCSJ, on January 25, 2009, Oleg Elnikov, spokesman for the MVD, responded to questions about the brochure by claiming that the author made "stylistic mistakes" and did not intend to offend Jews.

According to Forum 18 News Service, Baptists in the town of Lipetsk southeast of Moscow complained that the authorities were using "bureaucratic means" to restrict their activity in late 2008. Two local congregations lost legal status for failing to file tax returns on time. One of the congregations has been using a former Orthodox church (which Orthodox representatives now want returned) for nearly twenty years, and will be unable to defend its interests without legal status. Lipetsk's regional religious affairs official told Forum 18 that the Baptists are deliberately rejecting possible solutions "in order to aggravate the situation."

In November 2008 the Samara City Court banned the work of the Church of Scientology's Dianetics Center. The Samara Region Prosecutor's Office reported that Scientologists gave lectures and conducted seminars on dianetics and scientology without a license and also practiced "hypnotherapy and Ron Hubbard teaching."

On August 6, 2008, a Pentecostal student at the Kombi State Pedagogical Institute, Elvira Berea, appealed to the Syktyvkar City Court against a government decision to consider May 4 – a Sunday – as a working day. Bereza claimed that the government's decision violated article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which assures citizens' rights to private and family life.

On July 8, 2008, the Prosecutor of the Novosibirsk Region demanded that the Novosibirsk Central Court close the Church of Scientology's Dianetics Siberian Center, claiming that it conducted education activities without a license. According to the prosecutor's office, "psychologically and pedagogically this program is anti-scientific and potentially dangerous for psychological health and is morally unacceptable."

In a May 31 interview with Radio Vest, the head of the Commission of Experts under the Ministry of Justice, Aleksandr Dvorkin, stated that the "tiny, totalitarian Church of Scientology was the government religion of the United States."

At the 13th Congress of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, party leader Gennadiy Zyuganov spoke about "Jewish domination" in Russia in a public address.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Although there are several laws which address crimes motivated by ethnic or religious hatred, law enforcement agencies enforced these laws inconsistently, generally infrequently, and sometimes arbitrarily.

Authorities rarely prosecuted or sentenced those arrested for attacks and vandalism against religious minorities, and they often failed to bring hate-crime charges even when religious bigotry was clearly involved. Some government officials denied that there was a problem with hate crimes or claimed that if they did exist, they were manifestations of economic ills. Some government officials and human rights observers noted that, due to heavy caseloads, prosecutors chose to file easily proven charges of vandalism or hooliganism rather than risk an acquittal on the harder-to-prove hate-crime motive. As a result, hate crime legislation was often not enforced.

A resident of Omsk who put a fake bomb in front of a synagogue on November 2, 2008, was given a suspended sentence. He reportedly said that he was motivated by the proximity to the November 4 National Day of Consent and Reconciliation, which has been appropriated by far-right nationalists and often involves anti-Semitic and racist demonstrations and acts of violence. The defendant did not face hate crime charges but was convicted of spreading "a deliberately false alarm" concerning "an act of terrorism."

The Government used counterterrorism methods to commit serious violations of religious freedom against the Muslim population. There were numerous cases of Muslims being prosecuted for extremism or terrorism even when the accused had no clear connection to such activities. These included individuals detained for possessing religious literature such as the Qur'an or on the basis of evidence allegedly planted by the police. Local police allegedly subjected some persons suspected of Islamic extremism to poor treatment or torture.

According to human rights groups, a February 2003 Supreme Court decision to ban 15 Muslim groups for alleged ties to international terrorism made it easier for officials to arbitrarily detain Muslims for alleged connections to these groups. Currently, 18 Muslim groups are banned in Russia as illegal.

On May 7, 2009, the Russian Supreme Court ruled that the international religious organization Tablighi Jamaat was extremist and banned its activity. The General Prosecutor maintained that Tablighi Jamaat is a radical organization whose goal is the re-establishment of an Islamic caliphate, but Tablighi Jamaat and some human rights activists claimed that the organization scrupulously follows the law and exists solely to educate people about Islam.

On April 28, 2009, authorities in Dagestan prevented an assembly of activists from Nurjular, a Muslim religious organization, in Izberbash. The Russian Supreme Court banned Nurjular from Russia in April 2008. A spokesman for the FSB said that all activists who participated in the meeting were questioned and released, and that their activities remain under surveillance "across Dagestan and elsewhere in Russia."

In July 2008 police in Sochi arrested Dmitry Drofichev, a member of a group of Old Believers, for allegedly insulting land inspectors and threatening to destroy their equipment. He refused to vacate land intended for development ahead of the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Two other unnamed Old Believers were subsequently arrested and sentenced to 12 days in prison for resisting house inspections.

In May 2007, during an interethnic brawl in Stavropol between hundreds of Russian and Chechen youths, Gelani Atayev was badly beaten and soon after died of his injuries. Eyewitness Zaurbek Akhmadov said that riot troops and local police cheered on skinheads as they physically assaulted Atayev, who had been handcuffed. Police then put Atayev, still in handcuffs, and Akhmadov, who had been shot in the leg by police as he tried to help Atayev, in the back of a police vehicle. According to Akhmadov, the police refused for over an hour to allow medical attention for Atayev or Akhmadov, and in response to Akhmadov's cries to help Atayev and take him to a doctor, a policeman answered: "Don't worry. He won't be shouting Allah Akbar anymore." After an appeal from the Chechen Ombudsman for human rights, the Assistant to the Prosecutor General Kolesov sent a letter, saying: "Following the arrest of persons involved in the brawl G.R. Atayev was found dead with marks of injuries on his body in an OVD car, registered as belonging to Oktyabrskiy District Medical post of Stavropol." No further information was available at the end of the reporting period.

There were isolated instances of local officials detaining individuals who publicly discussed their religious views, but authorities usually resolved these cases quickly.

On May 13 and 14, 2007, police arrested and detained 15 members of the Voskresenye Baptist community in Ivanovo who were holding an event in a movie theater and distributing the New Testament and Book of Psalms. The organizers had a written agreement with the theater. The reason given for the police investigation appeared to

be erroneous. The police tried to intimidate the detainees and urged them not to attend Baptist meetings, stating that it was a "harmful sect." There were no further updates at the end of the reporting period. According to a March 26, 2009 report by the Slavic Law and Justice Center, in March the Ivanovo Baptist community was fighting the deportation of a U.S. Baptist minister involved in the incident. In December 2008, Wallach Nil, a U.S. citizen, was ordered deported after many years of coming to the region for "charitable and religious" work. He was given no reason for his deportation.

On May 4, 2009, Pskov authorities banned a guest performance of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which was scheduled at the local drama theater for the next day. Although the official reason for canceling the show was "technical complexity," the *Express-Gazeta* paper reported that the Pskov Regional Committee on Culture canceled the performance at the request of the Orthodox diocese. The office of the Archbishop refused to comment on the case.

While most detentions for religious practices involved Muslims, there were occasional reports of short-term police detentions of non-Muslims on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries throughout the country for brief periods or asked them to stop proselytizing, regardless of whether they were actually violating local statutes.

On May 8, 2009, police in Salsk (Rostov Oblast) detained a Jehovah's Witnesses attorney with foreign citizenship for allegedly violating article 18.10 of the Administrative and Criminal Code on "Violating the Rules of Engagement and Use of Foreign Labor in the Russian Federation." Authorities claimed that the attorney had been practicing law without a valid license. He had been representing the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Salsk City Court and had been legally representing Jehovah's Witnesses with a power of attorney for several years. He was forced to leave the country.

On May 7, 2009, authorities in Ramon (Voronezh Oblast) detained Yuriy Panov and Nikolay Sitnikov, two Jehovah's Witnesses. Police identified the men as suspects in several local robberies and took them to the local police station where they were fingerprinted and photographed. When the men refused to acknowledge any involvement in the robberies, police allegedly forced Panov to wear a gas mask, to which they cut off the oxygen supply. They also allegedly threatened Panov with sexual assault and electrically shocked him. Under duress, Panov admitted committing the crime. Police subsequently released both men and dropped all charges, stating that they had made a mistake.

On April 4, 2009, Russian Federal Security Service and police officials in Vladikavkaz detained and verbally abused two attorneys and one other traveler from Canada representing the Jehovah's Witnesses in a local court case. The lawsuit proposed to liquidate four LROs in North Ossetia (Vladikavkaz, Alagir, Mozdok, and Beslan). Officials claimed that the lawyers had entered a zone forbidden to foreigners when they pulled off the highway to visit the home of their driver's relatives. The Chief of Police spoke with Canadian embassy representatives, who were told that the group would be released without sanction. After five hours in detention, local law enforcement took the lawyers to the courthouse and told them that they would be tried for an alleged violation of the law controlling the movement of foreigners. On April 5, 2009, the local judge ruled that all three foreigners would be deported for violating the restricted zone and for being disrespectful to the police. The judge promised to free the detainees, provided that they would sign a statement indicating their desire to immediately leave Russia, which all three did. Police escorted them to the Vladikavkaz airport, from which they flew to Helsinki via Moscow without incident. The lawyers would be barred from Russia for five years if the deportation rulings come into force. The Jehovah's Witnesses have appealed the ruling.

On February 23, 2009, deaf Jehovah's Witnesses Vera Ivanova, Yulia Strokun, and Yelena Plotnikova were escorted to the police station in Bogdanovich where they were treated roughly and ridiculed for their religious beliefs by the local police chief.

In early 2009 the First Deputy Prosecutor General sent a letter to prosecutors' offices throughout Russia ordering wide-ranging investigations of all Jehovah's Witnesses LROs and religious groups. The prosecutor's office was requested to launch these investigations by the FSB. Subsequently, prosecutors' offices, the FSB, and police summoned members of congregations and LROs for questioning and visited Kingdom Halls and personal homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. As a result of these orders, law enforcement, security services, and judiciary officials have opened more than 500 recorded investigations of LROs and unregistered groups of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. Additionally, a large number of warnings and notices had been served on LROs through June 2009. On April 16, Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin sent a letter to the Prosecutor General protesting "the prejudicial attitude of certain officials of the prosecutor's office" toward Jehovah's Witnesses and asked him to "take steps to prohibit mass violations" of their rights. Lukin had not received a response to his letter at the end of the reporting period.

In 2008 officials conducted inspections of Jehovah's Witnesses' activities in the Republic of Bashkortostan (Belebey, Uchaly, and Salavat), Altay Republic (Gorno-Altaysk), Samara Region (Tolyatti and Samara), Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (Vladikavkaz), and Krasnodar Region (Krasnodar).

The Government designated the Islamic organization Hizb-ut-Tahrir as a terrorist organization in 2003. Col. Gen. Alexey Sedov, head of the Russian FSB's service for constitutional regime protection and counterterrorism, told journalists in Moscow in April 2009 that 10 Hizb-ut-Tahrir branches were "eliminated" in 2008. Courts in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and Udmurtia also prosecuted more than 20 members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The Sovetsky District Court of Kazan initiated a trial of an imam suspected of ties to Hizb-ut-Tahrir on April 1, 2009, charging him with "arranging activities of a social or religious association or other organization" which the court had banned for extremism.

There were no reports of religious prisoners in the country. There were, however, numerous reports of short-term detentions on religious grounds.

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 who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In April 2009 the Moscow Branch of the Salvation Army reported the Moscow City government had approved its registration. In *Moscow Branch of the Salvation Army v. Russia*, the ECHR ruled in October 2006 that the Government's refusal to re-register the Salvation Army's Moscow branch violated its members' right of assembly and freedom of religion.

The Ministry of Justice dropped its claims against the Russian Biblical Society (RBS) in December 2008. In its October review of the Society's operations, the Ministry of Justice had questioned the religious nature of the RBS because its members referred to themselves as "non-denominational Christians" and the organization had no clergy.

According to the SOVA Center, in December 2008 the Solntsevskiy Court in Moscow refused to liquidate Emmanuel, a Pentecostal seminary, for operating without a license to teach. The Ministry of Justice had previously targeted Emmanuel as one of 56 religious organizations for liquidation.

During the reporting period, President Medvedev met with religious leaders and spoke several times on the need to combat interethnic and interreligious intolerance.

Federal and regional officials participated actively in, and in many cases strongly

supported, a range of government and NGO-organized programs to promote tolerance.

The Commission for Human Rights in the Russian Federation, a government body headed by the Human Rights Ombudsman, released its annual report on human rights in April 2009. It publicized the difficulty that some religious groups faced in property restitution and land acquisition, and the difficulties that religious minorities faced with government officials.

Federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. While construction of the Museum of Tolerance, devoted to the history of the country's Jews and the Holocaust, was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2011, the global economic crisis delayed the timeline. Construction was expected to begin in the second half of 2009.

Federal and regional governments often allocated funding for the restoration of religious buildings. In 2008 the governments of Moscow city, Moscow Oblast, Belgorod, Volgograd, Novgorod, Tver Oblast, and Tatarstan provided funding for such activities. While the majority of religious organizations receiving support were Russian Orthodox, some Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant organizations also received financial support.

In 2008 local governments resolved a few controversial situations involving various Muslim communities. Authorities in Kaliningrad and Kostumuxa allocated land to local Muslim communities for the construction of mosques.

In 2008 the Seventh-day Adventist community in Novosibirsk successfully defended its property rights to a prayer house, three years after a dispute arose with the city administration.

Law enforcement organizations have achieved some measure of success in arresting members of Russian neo-Nazi and nationalist organizations, while courts sentenced several such persons to prison for their actions. In one instance, police and FSB officers arrested a neo-Nazi gang in Vladimir in late 2008 for crimes committed between June 2005 and early 2008, including vandalism of a Jewish charity in 2005.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, including some physical attacks against individuals and communities because of the victims' religious affiliation. According to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, monitoring agencies reported 57 crimes of an anti-Semitic nature. Groups that monitor hate crimes reported at least 80 incidents of vandalism against religious targets, including at least 48 against the ROC, 13 aimed at Jews, and nine against Muslims. According to the SOVA Center, the number of reported incidents did not dramatically differ from past reports, but perpetrators acted more aggressively in 2008, often committing acts involving arson and explosives, rather than mere graffiti.

On May 25, 2009, unknown assailants killed the deputy head of the Dagestani Muslim Spiritual Board Ahmed Tagayev in Makhachkala, Dagestan. The Coordination Center of North Caucasus Muslims believed that Tagayev was attacked because of his opposition to radical Islam.

On April 20, 2009, unidentified attackers shot and killed prominent religious leader Musa Esmurziyev in Nazran, Ingushetiya as he left his car.

On March 2, 2009, unknown assailants pulled the director of the Ingushetiya Hajj Committee, Mullah Musa Meriyev, out of his car and severely beat him. Police initiated a search for the culprits, but no arrests were made. On the same day, unknown assailants attacked two imams of the Sunzhensky Region (Ingushetiya) with baseball bats while they sat in their car, then shot at the car before leaving the scene.

In February 2007 police charged suspects in the 2004 killing of Nikolay Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism. Girenko had served for many years as an expert witness in trials involving alleged skinheads and neo-Nazis. The case was expected to go to trial in the summer of 2008. According to Girenko's associates, the trial was ongoing at the end of the reporting period. Both the defense and human rights activists complained about a lack of media attention to the case.

Anti-Semitism remained a serious problem, and there were several anti-Semitic attacks on synagogues during the reporting period, including on August 16, 2008, in Nizhny Novgorod, where unknown attackers broke a synagogue's windows.

On March 9, 2009, two young men dressed as neo-Nazis attacked two students, one of whom was the son of a Jewish Agency employee. The attack occurred during the Jewish holiday of Purim.

In February 2009 the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia (FEOR) issued a statement criticizing supplementary reading material for high school and university students in the Ulyanovsk Region. The Ulyanovsk supplement, entitled "additional reading" for students taking classes on world religion, portrays Jews and Judaism negatively; it blames Jews for the Bolshevik Revolution, characterizes Judaism as an occult, almost satanic religion, and accuses Jews of intending to dominate the world.

Crimes that would normally be considered bias crimes against a particular community were commonly charged as "hooliganism," as prosecutors, even by governmental admission, were reluctant to pursue aggravated charges of racial bias in crimes and were often content to apply a lesser charge. At times, there was a concern of not being able to win a court judgment of a bias crime. In instances where local authorities prosecuted cases, courts often imposed suspended sentences. Under the law, an individual convicted of committing an act of vandalism motivated by ideological, political, national, racial, and religious hatred or enmity can be sentenced for up to three years' confinement.

There were many reports of anti-Semitic publications, including several small, radical-nationalist newspapers that print anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic articles. Many of these publications appeared to violate the law against extremism and were readily available throughout the country. There were also reports of other anti-Semitic literature on sale in cities across the country.

On August 20, 2008, FEOR's Department of Law Defense and Struggle against Anti-Semitism sent a letter to an internet portal which hosted a web page for the *Rus Pravoslavnaya* newspaper, a distributor of anti-Semitic literature. The Russian Prosecutor's office stated that it could not interfere in the case since the website is registered in the United States. The Kirovskiy City Court of St. Petersburg considered the case against the website's chief editor, Konstantin Dushenov, in March 2008. At the end of the reporting period, no charges had been filed.

Terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya promoted negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Hostility toward non-ROC religious groups sparked harassment and occasional physical attacks. Religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to differentiate between economically motivated crimes and those based on xenophobia or religious discrimination. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and occasionally staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religious groups.

Muslims continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some regions. After terrorists associated with Chechen, Ingush, and Islamic extremists seized a school in 2004 in Beslan, North Ossetia, interethnic and interreligious tensions resulting in discrimination persisted in the region without the authorities' intervention, according to NGOs. Government officials, journalists, and the public liberally labeled Islamic organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Numerous

press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

Yuriy Kokov, head of the Interior Ministry's Department for the Fight against Extremism, announced on April 21, 2009 that Russian authorities dismantled the military activities of more than a dozen radical "Wahhabist" groups in the North Caucasus in late 2008 and early 2009.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and ROC believers were generally harmonious. Extremely traditional or orthodox versions of Islam were often associated in the public mind with terrorism and radical Muslim fighters in the North Caucasus.

Vandals desecrated several synagogues, Jewish community centers, cemeteries, and memorials in Moscow, Kaliningrad, Leningrad Oblast, Mahachkala, Nizhniy Novgorod, Ryazan, Saratov, Ulyanovsk, and Yaroslavl.

The SOVA Center reported 36 violations of houses of worship in 2008, including 16 against Orthodox sites, seven against Jewish sites, six against Protestant sites, six against Muslim sites, one against a pagan temple, and one against Jehovah's Witnesses. This was a slight increase from the 27 acts recorded in 2007. Jehovah's Witnesses reported one case of arson in Chekhov on July 11, 2008, and three reported incidents of vandalism against Kingdom Halls. Police opened an investigation into the arson in Chekhov, with no results by the end of the reporting period.

The SOVA Center reported an increase in acts of vandalism of cemeteries – 42 cases in 2007, compared to 34 in 2007. These acts targeted Orthodox, Muslim, and Jewish cemeteries, and in many cases were done by teenagers.

Relations remained generally positive between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. Bishop Ilarion, Chairman for the Department for External Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, noted on April 10, 2009, that Patriarch Kirill will not rule out meeting with Roman Catholic Pope Benedict XVI, should the Roman Catholic Church renounce its missionary activity in Russia.

The press routinely continued to refer to Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious "sect," although they have been in the country for approximately a century. Aleksandr Dvorkin, President of the Russian Association of Centers for Religious and Sectarian Studies, labeled the Mormons as a "sect" in August 2008. He claimed that "over 80 big sects" were active in more than half of Russia, and that minor sects numbered "in the thousands." In April 2009 members of the Ministry of Justice's Commission of Experts elected Dvorkin to chair the Commission.

Jehovah's Witnesses officials reported several physical attacks on their members throughout the country. They also noted a significant increase in the number of detentions of Jehovah's Witnesses by police and an increase in the number of reported physical attacks against members after the Prosecutor General's Office ordered regional prosecutor's offices to gather information on Jehovah's Witnesses' activities. The exact number of reported cases has not been verified.

On July 29, 2008, the press reported that the Russian Olympic team would receive spiritual care only from Russian Orthodox priests. All team members were also given icons of the Mother of God and the Savior as a sign of blessing from Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksey II.

On May 15, 2009, a local prosecutor in Moscow charged former Sakharov Center director Yuriy Samodurov and former curator of the New Tretyakov Gallery Andrey Yerofeyev with promoting religious hatred under article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code for installing a modern art exhibit entitled "Forbidden Art" in 2006. The trial was ongoing at the end of the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice and a number of minority "nontraditional" religious leaders asserted that the Government and majority religious groups increasingly used the mass media, conferences, and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religions, characterizing them as threats to physical, mental, and spiritual health, and asserting that these groups threatened national security. Television channels broadcast several programs about "dangerous cults and sects" and implied that these groups included Pentecostals and other proselytizing religions.

On April 10, 2009, the Central Court of Khabarovsk ruled that Molodaya Gvardiya (Young Guard), a youth group associated with the United Russia political party, distributed extremist leaflets at the July 2008 Indian Culture Festival accusing Hare Krishnas of "crimes against people and society," "sexual exploitation of children," "trafficking in drugs and weapons," and "murders and other illegal acts." The court indicated that the materials incited religious discord but only issued a warning to the group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, religious groups, NGOs, and religious freedom advocates in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the U.S. Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok regularly raised reported violations of religious freedom with government officials. Embassy and consulate officers worked with NGOs to encourage the development of cooperative programs designed to train law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. Senior embassy officials discussed religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the presidential administration and other government agencies, including the MFA, raising specific cases of concern. Federal officials responded by investigating some of those cases and by keeping embassy staff informed on issues they raised. As part of continuing efforts to monitor the overall climate of religious tolerance, the Embassy and consulates general maintained frequent contact with working-level officials at the Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

One position in the Embassy's political section was dedicated to reporting on religious freedom issues. This officer worked closely with other U.S. officers in the Embassy and Consulates General around the country.

Consular officers routinely assisted U.S. citizens involved in criminal, customs, and immigration cases; officers were sensitive to any indications that these cases involved possible violations of religious freedom. U.S. officials raised such issues with the MFA and with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Because U.S. missionaries and religious workers comprised a significant component of the local U.S. citizen population, the Embassy conducted a vigorous outreach program to provide consular services; maintain contact for emergency planning purposes; and inquire about the missionaries' experiences with immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He met with many religious leaders from the country and the United States to discuss their concerns.

The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government on its adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the U.S. Department of State met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations, as well as with visiting representatives of local religious organizations, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering local religious organizations.

Officials of the Consulates General in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg met with religious leaders from a range of denominations in several cities.
