

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	440
Land:	Kina
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	2015 Report on International Religious Freedom – China
Udgivet:	10. august 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	31. oktober 2016

[EN](#) | [DE](#)

- **Source:**
USDOS - US Department of State
- **Title:**
2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - China
- **Publication date:**
10 August 2016
- **ecoi.net summary:** Annual report on religious freedom (covering 2015) [ID 328358]
- **Countries:**
China
- **Original link** <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2015/eap/256097.htm>

Recommended citation:

USDOS - US Department of State: 2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - China, 10 August 2016 (available at ecoi.net)

http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/328358/455634_en.html (accessed 30 August 2016)



2015 Report on International Religious Freedom - China

Executive Summary

Reports on Hong Kong, Macau, and Tibet are appended at the end of this report.

The People's Republic of China's constitution states citizens have "freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" and does not define "normal." In practice, the government exercised state control over religion and restricted the activities and personal freedom of religious adherents when these were perceived to threaten state or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interests, according to nongovernmental organization (NGO) and international media reports. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant), are permitted to register with the government and are officially permitted to hold worship services.

Over this past year, there continued to be reports that the government physically abused, detained, arrested, tortured, sentenced to prison, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. Human rights organizations stated police shot and killed Uighur Muslims during house raids and protests after conflicts arose due to stricter government controls on religious expression and practice in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. A Falun Gong group reported abductions, detention, and a death in police custody. The government continued to cite concerns over the "three evils" of "ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism" as grounds to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Uighur Muslims. The government sought the forcible repatriation of Uighurs from foreign countries, many of whom sought asylum in those countries on the grounds of religious persecution.

According to media and NGO reports, seven Tibetans, including monks, nuns, and laypersons, self-immolated during the year in protest of restrictive government policies, including those restricting religious freedom. Authorities often justified official interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating them with separatism and pro-independence activities. Authorities in Zhejiang Province ordered the destruction of more than 1,500 crosses on Christian churches, as well as some church buildings, as part of a campaign against "illegal structures," according to NGO and press reports. Many Zhejiang pastors and congregants openly resisted the campaign, resulting in the detention of several church leaders and activists, including Pastor Huang Yizi in September, and human rights lawyer Zhang Kai, detained by authorities immediately prior to a scheduled meeting with the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. Local authorities in many areas used a variety of means to punish members of unregistered religious or spiritual groups, including Christian "house churches." Authorities in Guangdong Province sentenced Buddhist leader Wu Zeheng to life in

prison on what advocacy groups stated were politically motivated charges. In some parts of the country, however, local authorities allowed or at least did not interfere with the activities of unregistered religious groups.

Uighur Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists reported severe societal discrimination in employment, housing, and business opportunities. Discrimination was particularly acute around politically “sensitive” anniversaries and major religious events. In Xinjiang, tension between Uighur Muslims and Han Chinese continued. For example, many hospitals and businesses reportedly would not provide services to women wearing veils.

U.S. officials, including the President and the Secretary of State, repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns about violations of religious freedom in China. U.S. officials consistently urged the government to adhere to internationally recognized rights of religious freedom. In meeting with members from diverse religious communities, U.S. officials also acknowledged some improvements in the ability of some house churches to meet and operate. The embassy protested the imprisonment of individuals on charges related to religious freedom. The Ambassador highlighted the importance of religious freedom during his May visit to Lhasa and Xi'an, and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom reiterated this during his August visit to Beijing, Shijiazhuang, Shanghai, and Hangzhou.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On February 29, 2016, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 1.4 billion (July 2015 estimate). In its report to the UN Human Rights Council during China's Universal Periodic Review in October 2013, the Chinese government stated there were more than 100 million religious believers, 360,000 clergy, 140,000 places of worship, and 5,500 religious groups. Government estimates of religious adherents have remained unchanged for years. Many experts believe official estimates grossly understate numbers of religious adherents, though unofficial estimates vary widely. For example, a 2007 survey conducted by East China Normal University stated that 31.4 percent of citizens aged 16 years and over were religious believers. The same survey estimated there were 200 million Buddhists, Taoists, or worshippers of folk gods, although accurate estimates are difficult to make because many adherents practice exclusively at home.

According to the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), there are more than 21 million Muslims; unofficial estimates range as high as 50 million. Hui Muslims are concentrated primarily in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces. Uighur Muslims live primarily in Xinjiang. The State Council's *2015 White Paper on Xinjiang* reports Hui, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uighur, and other ethnic minorities constitute 14.63 million residents in Xinjiang, or 63 percent of the total population.

Prior to the government's 1999 ban on Falun Gong, the government estimated that there were 70 million adherents.

The *2011 Blue Book of Religions*, produced by the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a research institution directly reporting to the State Council, reported the number of Protestants to be between 23 and 40 million. A June 2010 SARA report estimated there were 16 million Protestants affiliated with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), the state-sanctioned umbrella organization for all officially recognized Protestant churches. According to 2012 Pew Research Center estimates, there were 68 million Protestants, of whom 23 million are affiliated with the TSPM. According to SARA, there are 60,000 registered Protestant churches and 23 Christian theological colleges.

According to SARA, more than 5.5 million Catholics worship in sites registered by the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA), the state-sanctioned organization for all officially recognized Catholic churches. The Pew Center estimates there are nine million Catholics, 5.7 million of whom are affiliated with the CPA.

Some ethnic minorities retain traditional religions, such as Dongba among the Naxi people in Yunnan Province and Buluo-tuo among the Zhuang in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Media reports state Tibetan Buddhism is growing in popularity among the Han Chinese population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states citizens have “freedom of religious belief,” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities.” The constitution does not define “normal.” The constitution provides for the right to hold or not hold a religious belief and states that state organs, public organizations, and individuals may not discriminate against citizens “who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion.” The law does not allow for legal action to be taken against the government on the basis of the religious freedom protections afforded by the constitution. Criminal law allows the state to sentence government officials to up to two years in prison if they violate a citizen's religious freedom.

CCP members and members of the armed forces are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. Members who belong to religious organizations are subject to expulsion, although these rules are not universally enforced. The vast majority of public office holders are CCP members, and being a member is widely considered a prerequisite for success in a government career.

The 2005 Regulation on Religious Affairs requires religious groups to register with the government. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services. These five associations operate under the direction of the CCP United Front Work Department. Other religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with the official patriotic religious association or Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities. Proselytizing in public or meeting in unregistered places of worship is not permitted. Tibetan Buddhists in China are not free to venerate the Dalai Lama openly. The country's laws and policies do not provide a mechanism for religious groups independent of the five official government patriotic religious associations to obtain legal status.

All religious organizations are required to register with SARA or its provincial and local offices. Registered religious organizations are allowed to possess property, publish approved materials, train staff, and collect donations. According to regulations, religious organizations must submit information about the organization's historical background, doctrines, key publications, minimum funding requirements, and a government sponsor.

In addition to the five nationally recognized religions, local governments permit certain religious communities and practices, such as Orthodox Christianity in Xinjiang, Heilongjiang, Zhejiang, and Guangdong provinces. Worship of Mazu, a folk deity with Taoist roots, has been reclassified as “cultural heritage” rather than religious practice.

The government and the Holy See do not have diplomatic relations, and the Vatican has no representative in the country. The CPA does not recognize the authority of the Holy See to appoint Catholic bishops; approximately 40 Catholic bishops remain independent of the CPA and operate unofficially. Several of those bishops have been detained for many years or are under close government surveillance. The Regulation on the Election and Consecration of Bishops requires candidate bishops to publicly pledge support for the CCP.

Certain religious or spiritual groups are banned by law. The criminal law defines banned groups as “cult organizations,” and those belonging to them can be sentenced to prison. A judicial explanation states this term refers to “those illegal groups that have been found using religions, *qigong* [a traditional Chinese exercise discipline], or other things as a camouflage, deifying their leading members, recruiting and controlling their members, and deceiving people by molding and spreading superstitious ideas, and endangering society.” There are no published criteria for determining, or procedures for challenging, such a designation. The government maintains a ban on the Guanyin Method Sect (Guanyin Famen or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), Zhong Gong (a *qigong* exercise discipline), and Falun Gong. The government also considers several Christian groups to be “evil cults,” including the Shouters, Eastern Lightning, Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), Full Scope Church (Quan Fanwei Jiaohui), Spirit Sect, New Testament Church, Three Grades of Servants (San Ban Puren), Association of Disciples, Lord God Sect, Established King Church, Unification Church, Family of Love, and South China Church.

A National Security Law passed in July by the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) explicitly bans “cult organizations.” An amendment to the criminal law passed by the NPCSC in August increases the maximum possible sentence for “organizing and using a cult to undermine implementation of the law” from 15 years to life in prison.

The religious and social regulations permit official patriotic religious associations to engage in activities, such as building places of worship, training religious leaders, publishing literature, and providing social services to local

communities. The CCP's United Front Work Department, SARA, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs provide policy guidance and supervision on the implementation of these regulations. Most leaders of official government religious organizations serve in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a CCP-led body that provides advice to the central government from business leaders, academics, and other segments of society.

A law implemented by the Urumqi Municipal People's Congress Standing Committee in January prohibits residents from wearing veils that cover the face. A separate regulation approved by the Xinjiang People's Congress Standing Committee in January bans the practice of religion in government buildings and the wearing of clothes associated with "religious extremism." An amendment to the criminal law and a judicial interpretation by the national Supreme People's Procuratorate and the Supreme People's Court published in November criminalizes the act of forcing others to wear "extremist" garments. Neither the amendment nor the judicial interpretation defines what garments or symbols are considered "extremist."

Since 2005, SARA has stated through a policy posted on its website that family and friends have the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government.

According to the law, inmates have the right to believe in a religion and maintain their religious beliefs while in custody.

The government offers some subsidies for the construction of state-sanctioned places of worship and religious schools.

By regulation, if a religious structure is to be demolished or relocated because of city planning or construction of key projects, the party responsible for demolishing the structure should consult with its local Bureau of Religious Affairs (administered by SARA) and the religious group using the structure. If all parties agree to the demolition, the party conducting the demolition should agree to rebuild the structure or provide compensation equal to its appraised market value.

Patriotic religious associations and registered religious organizations are allowed to compile and print religious materials for internal use. To distribute religious materials publicly, an organization must follow national printing regulations, which restrict the publication and distribution of literature with religious content. Under the law, religious texts published without authorization, including Bibles and Qurans, may be confiscated and unauthorized publishing houses closed. The government allows some foreign educational institutions to provide religious materials in Chinese, which are used by both registered and unregistered religious groups.

Under national regulations, parents are permitted to instruct children under 18 in the beliefs of officially recognized religious groups, and children may participate in religious activities. Xinjiang officials, however, require minors to complete nine years of compulsory education before they can receive religious education. In Xinjiang, regulations forbid minors from participating in religious activities and impose penalties on organizations and individuals who "organize, entice, or force" minors to participate in religious activities.

The teaching of atheism in schools is mandated.

The law states job applicants shall not face discrimination in hiring based on factors including religious belief.

Birth limitation policies remain in force, but Chinese authorities further relaxed the one-child policy in November to allow all Chinese couples to have two children.

The constitution states official government religious bodies are not "subject to any foreign domination." A CCP directive to universities provides guidance on how to prevent proselytizing among university students by foreigners.

The law permits domestic NGOs, including religious organizations, to receive donations in foreign currency. The law requires documented approval by SARA of donations from foreign sources to domestic religious groups of more than one million renminbi (RMB) (\$154,000). Overseas donations received by religious organizations receive favorable tax treatment if the funds are used for charitable activities.

Government Practices

There were reports the government physically abused, detained, arrested, tortured, sentenced to prison, or harassed adherents of both registered and unregistered religious groups for activities related to their religious beliefs and practices. The government cited concerns over the "three evils" of "ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism" as grounds to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Uighur Muslims. Throughout the country, religious affairs officials and security organs scrutinized and restricted the religious activities of registered and unregistered religious and spiritual groups, including assembling for religious worship, expressing religious beliefs in public and in private, and publishing religious texts. The

government's repression of religious freedom remained most severe in Xinjiang and in Tibetan areas, according to media and NGO sources.

Human rights organizations reported some instances of security forces firing their weapons at groups of Uighurs. Authorities typically characterized these operations as targeting "separatists" or "terrorists." According to reports, these actions bred resentment and, at times, deadly protests.

In September reports stated 50 people were killed and dozens wounded after an attack at the Sogan coal mine in Baicheng County in Xinjiang. Citing a government official in Baicheng, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported the Uighur attackers might have been seeking vengeance for what the official described as a coercive government campaign aimed at combating "religious extremism." According to RFA, government sources reported authorities conducted a police raid and killed 28 Uighur Muslim suspects believed to have carried out the mine attack, including 11 women and children. State media reported 28 "terrorist gang" members from three families were killed. Government sources reported to RFA that all three Uighur Muslim families showed signs of "religious extremism," stating the women wore headscarves and long dresses.

According to a report published by Ming Hui, a U.S.-based news organization affiliated with Falun Gong, Fujian Province officials intimidated, kidnapped, abducted, sentenced, or sent to reeducation camps 13 members of the Falun Gong in the first half of the year. Among them, three were sentenced to prison and one died in police detention.

Pastor Zhang Shaojie, a TSPM pastor in Nanle County, Henan Province, remained in prison after a court sentenced him to 12 years for "picking quarrels and disturbing public order" and "fraud" in July 2014. Zhang and several members of his congregation had been involved in a land dispute between the church and the Nanle County government. Advocacy groups reported authorities subjected family members and other members of the church to police surveillance, verbal threats, and unannounced investigations throughout the year.

In Guangdong Province, founder of the Buddhist Huazang Dharma group Wu Zeheng, also known as Master Xingwu, was sentenced to life in prison in October on charges including rape, fraud, producing and selling toxic food, and organizing a "cult." He and more than a dozen followers were arrested in coordinated raids in 2014 on charges of using a "cult organization" to undermine the implementation of the law. Wu and followers detained during the raids remained in detention throughout the year as authorities purportedly gathered evidence to try his case. Some human rights organizations and media reports stated that authorities targeted Wu for his religious beliefs and his human rights activism and that the criminal charges were spurious.

Other Buddhist monks reported harassment against themselves and family members. Zen Buddhist monk Lin Bin (also known as Master Wangyun) of Fujian Province was taken into custody by the police in July while visiting Sichuan Province. At the same time, his temple in Ningde, Fujian Province, was shut down and his mother, who served as janitor at the temple, was forcefully relocated to a temple in Badu Township in Ningde. Police confiscated all items in the temple. Authorities arrested Wangyun in connection with his participation in protests against a heavy metal extracting and coating plant project that severely polluted the environment, according to reports.

Underground Catholic priest Song Wanjun's whereabouts remained unknown after he was detained by officials in Hebei Province in August 2013. There was no new information on Su Zhimin, an unregistered Catholic bishop who disappeared after being taken into police custody in 1996. In February authorities reported to the family of underground Catholic Bishop Cosmas Shi Enxiang of Yi County, Hebei Province, that the Bishop died in prison 14 years after his disappearance. Authorities had held him without charge at an unknown location since 2001.

Thaddeus Ma Daqin, who is recognized by the Vatican as the successor to Aloysius Jin Luxian as Bishop of Shanghai, has rarely been seen in public after announcing his resignation from the CPA during his July 2012 Vatican-sanctioned consecration ceremony. He reportedly has spent most of his time since in seclusion at the Sheshan Catholic Seminary outside Shanghai, although he occasionally posted on social media and his blog. The Shanghai Diocese did not have a leader after Jin Luxian's death in April 2013, and at year's end it was being managed by a five-priest caretaker council.

Harassment of unregistered bishops and priests continued, including government surveillance and repeated detentions. In March local religious affairs bureau officials and police in Mudanjiang, Heilongjiang, detained unregistered Catholic priests Shao Yunquan and Cao Jianyou just as they finished celebrating Mass. The Mudanjiang church reported local religious affairs bureau officials often interrupted their services.

Individuals belonging to or supporting other banned groups were imprisoned or sentenced to administrative detention on charges such as "distributing cult materials" or "using a heretical organization to subvert the law." In April courts in Shijiazhuang Municipality, Hebei Province, sentenced Bian Xiaohui, the daughter of an imprisoned Falun Gong practitioner, to more than three years in prison. The courts also sentenced Bian's aunt Chen Yinghua, a Falun Gong practitioner, to four years in prison. Authorities detained the pair in March 2014.

after Bian held up a sign reading “I want to see my father” outside of a Shijiazhuang prison where her father, Bian Lichao, was serving a 12-year sentence for practicing Falun Gong, and Chen documented the protest online.

Religious groups reported that “patriotic religious associations” were subjected to various forms of CCP interference in matters of doctrine, theology, and religious practice. Local authorities pressured religious believers to affiliate with patriotic associations and used administrative detention, including confinement and abuse in administrative detention centers, to punish members of unregistered religious or spiritual groups. While reeducation-through-labor camps were officially abolished in 2013, advocacy groups and international media reported some camps simply had been relabeled and continued to hold members of religious and spiritual groups.

Some prisoners and detainees of faith were forced to recant their beliefs (particularly Falun Gong practitioners, whom the government reportedly subjected to “transformation through reeducation”) or were not provided adequate access to religious materials, facilities, or clergy. For example, in Zhejiang Province, detention centers denied family members’ requests to deliver Bibles and food to the detained.

International Falun Gong-affiliated NGOs and international media reported detentions of Falun Gong practitioners continued to increase around “sensitive” dates. Authorities instructed neighborhood communities to report Falun Gong members to officials and offered monetary rewards to citizens who informed on Falun Gong practitioners. Ahead of the March meetings of the National People’s Congress and CPPCC, Tianjin authorities detained at least 20 Falun Gong practitioners and confiscated Falun Gong texts, computers, cell phones, and other personal belongings, according to the Falun Gong-affiliated news outlet Ming Hui. Ming Hui reported Tianjin Public Security Bureau Director Zhao Fei offered awards of 10,000 RMB (\$1,540) to officers for each practitioner taken into custody.

Detained practitioners were reportedly subjected to various methods of physical and psychological coercion, such as sleep deprivation, in attempts to force them to renounce their beliefs. Reports from overseas Falun Gong-affiliated advocacy groups estimated thousands of adherents in the country had been given terms of up to three years in administrative detention. According to the human rights monitoring NGO Dui Hua Foundation, there were 2,882 Falun Gong prisoners serving sentences as of October 31. While this number was an increase from 2014, Dui Hua noted that the increase did not necessarily signify a crackdown on Falun Gong members, as there has been a trend of lighter sentencing over the last five years, including a number of suspended sentences.

According to a report published by Ming Hui, in Guangdong Province authorities “persecuted, intimidated, kidnapped, disappeared, sentenced, or sent to reeducation-through-labor camps” 91 Falun Gong practitioners in the first half of the year. Of these, 24 Falun Gong members were prosecuted and seven sentenced to terms of imprisonment from one to four years, according to the report. The report stated many lawyers defending Falun Gong members were forbidden from meeting with their clients, faced harassment by police or officials from the justice department, and were threatened with revocation of their professional licenses unless they withdrew to allow for replacement by a court-appointed lawyer. Lawyers were unable to exercise normal legal functions in all Falun Gong-related court trials, such as by presenting defense statements or evidence or witnesses, according to reports by Ming Hui and legal advocates. Some lawyers were expelled by the judge on-site and ejected from the court by police.

Human rights organizations report multiple Falun Gong practitioners were detained under suspicion of “subversion of state power,” including Zheng Jingxian in June and Huang Qian in February. The detained were reportedly subjected to physical abuse and interrogations, denied access to their attorneys, or sent to reeducation camps. According to Falun Gong advocacy groups, on August 25 Falun Gong member Guo Bizhen was arrested by the Fuzhou police while distributing Falun Gong leaflets in a local residential compound and subsequently denied access to her lawyer multiple times. Reports indicated that in September three Falun Gong members were arrested by Guangdong Province police while they were having a party at home. While one person was released, two others were sent to reeducation through labor camp. Other Falun Gong members were denied a fair trial. During the trial of Ye Guanghui in September, the court’s chief judge refused all requests to observe the trial and allowed only Ye’s lawyer to participate in the court session.

According to reports, in November authorities reduced the sentence of Church of the Almighty God member Lai Yiwa by six months, the first known act of clemency afforded to a Church of Almighty God member. Lai was sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment in April 2013.

Falun Gong practitioner Wang Zhiwen continued to be held under house arrest after his October 2014 release from prison. Following his 15-year sentence for “cult-related” activities, Chinese authorities continued to deny him a passport so he could be reunited with family members overseas. He was reported to be in poor health and lacking adequate medical care.

The CCP continued to maintain a Leading Small Group for Preventing and Dealing with the Problem of Heretical Cults as well as an extralegal, CCP-run security apparatus known as “610” offices (named for the date of its creation on June 10, 1999) to eliminate the Falun Gong movement and other “cult organizations.”

Human rights lawyers defending religious adherents were subject to harassment, detention, and professional pressure. On August 25, authorities in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, detained and placed under “residential surveillance” in an unspecified location Christian human rights lawyer Zhang Kai on suspicion of “gathering a crowd to disturb the social order” and leaking state secrets to foreign entities. Zhang had provided legal counsel to churches facing cross removals and church demolitions as part of Zhejiang Province’s campaign against “illegal structures.” His legal assistants, Liu Peng and Fang Xiangui, and Pastor Huang Yizi were also detained. Authorities released Liu Peng, Fang Xiangui, and four pastors in mid-December. Zhang Kai, Huang Yizi, and several other pastors, however, remained in detention at unknown locations at the end of the year. Authorities denied multiple requests by lawyers and family members to see Zhang, and subjected his family members to harassment. Zhang was detained before a scheduled meeting with the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom during his visit to the region.

Authorities continued to restrict the movement and access to medical care of human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who had defended religious groups including Christians and Falun Gong members, after his release from prison in August 2014. Gao reported that after his release, government agents continued to subject him to intrusive visits at home and deny him permission to travel for medical treatment. After detailing to a reporter the mistreatment he suffered while in prison, including beatings to his face with an electric baton, inadequate food rations, and years in solitary confinement, Gao was again detained by authorities on September 23 and released a day later.

The government did not renew the professional licenses of a number of attorneys who advocated for religious freedom, and it imprisoned other religious freedom activists or otherwise impeded their work on behalf of religious clients. Authorities also harassed or detained the family members, including children, of religious leaders and religious freedom activists.

In some parts of the country, authorities charged religious believers not affiliated with a patriotic religious association with various crimes, including “illegal religious activities” or “disrupting social stability.”

Chinese authorities frequently tightened security in advance of major Tibetan holidays and the birthday of the exiled Tibetan religious leader, the Dalai Lama. In a Tibetan region of Gansu Province in June, several hundred people held a ritual “blessing ceremony” which later drew truckloads of security forces and armed police, according to RFA. In March several hundred armed police and drones monitored a crowd in Gansu Province which gathered for the unveiling of a new religious painting.

The government did not recognize house churches and closely monitored their activities. Some officials maintained house churches did not exist, according to reports. Although SARA has said family and friends had the right to meet at home for worship, including prayer and Bible study, without registering with the government, authorities still regularly harassed and detained small groups that met for religious purposes in homes and other locations. Some house church members said they had more freedom than in the past to conduct religious services, as long as they gathered only in private and kept congregation numbers low. In some areas, however, authorities shut down churches that tried to maintain a low profile.

There were reports authorities applied indirect pressure on house churches to cease their activities. Some house churches reported authorities harassed and pressured their landlords to break property leases with the churches. Some house churches reported local government authorities shut down their services. In Guangdong Province, authorities shut down the services of unregistered Zhongfu Wumin Church repeatedly throughout the year. The pastor, Liu Peng, filed an appeal stating the Notice to Cease Illegal Religious Activities given to his church in August was unlawful under the country’s constitution. Advocacy groups reported in August that the Shantou Municipal Religious Affairs Bureau closed Zhongfu Tonxin Church, a non-TSPM church in Guangdong Province, because of the church’s contact with overseas media. In September authorities in Guangdong Province placed under house arrest members of the Guangfu House Church for attempting to travel to Beijing to protest church service shutdowns, raids, and property confiscation. In Sichuan Province, advocacy groups reported that police detained unregistered Langzhong House Church member Luo Guangwu in June for “participating in illegal activities” after leaving a church service.

Advocacy groups reported in June house church leaders Zhao Weiliang and Cheng Hongpeng in Cao County, Shandong Province, were found guilty of “using a cult to undermine law enforcement” and sentenced to four and three years in prison, respectively. The court ruled that Zhao and Cheng were organizers of the government-banned “cult” Full Scope Church, an affiliation that both denied. In Sichuan Province, police raided a house church and took away two women for questioning, saying the church was under investigation for being a “cult.” The women were eventually allowed to return home but police notified the church that they were forbidden to continue meeting.

Security officials frequently interrupted outdoor services of the unregistered Shouwang Church in Beijing and detained people attending those services for several days without charge. Reports indicated the average length of these detentions increased from hours to days. In October authorities subjected four members of the Shouwang Church to 10 days of administrative detention for “disturbing public order” after gathering to worship in public. Church Pastor Jin Tianming continued to be held under surveillance, according to reports from advocacy groups. Government officials continued to pressure prospective landlords against renting facilities to the Shouwang Church, which reportedly lost its leased building in 2011 due to government pressure.

In Xinjiang, the government continued to cite concerns over the three evils – “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” – as a reason to enact and enforce repressive measures against the religious practices of Uighur Muslims. Authorities often failed to distinguish between peaceful religious practice and criminal or terrorist activities, according to human rights organizations. It remained difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those pursuing political goals, the right to worship, or criminal acts.

As in previous years, authorities in Xinjiang imposed strict controls on religious practice during Ramadan. The government barred government employees, teachers, professors, civil servants, and CCP members from fasting and attending religious services at mosques. Authorities ordered restaurants to remain open during Ramadan. The government sponsored beer festivals in Niya County, Hotan Prefecture, during Ramadan, reportedly to “dilute the religious atmosphere.” The festivals included beer drinking contests that featured cash prizes up to 1,000 RMB (\$154) for winners, according to media reports. There were also reports local government policy directives ordered Uighur shopkeepers in Kashgar and Hotan to stock alcohol and cigarettes during Ramadan. In July officials conducted visits to student dormitories in Qutubi County to ensure the students were not fasting during Ramadan.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied international media reports stating Uighur Muslims were banned from Ramadan fasting, and maintained that Uighurs’ religious freedoms were guaranteed by the country’s constitution. Reports published on the official websites of local governments in Xinjiang, however, indicated authorities restricted certain groups of Uighurs from observing Ramadan, including CCP members, their relatives, students, and the employees of state-owned enterprises and state-run organizations, and hosted “atheist education events.”

The government sought the forcible return of Uighurs living outside the country, many of whom had sought asylum from religious persecution, according to human rights organizations. Uighurs continued to flee the country and refugee arrivals in Turkey were estimated at 5,000 to 6,000 in 2015, according to press reports. According to media reports, hundreds of Uighurs fled or attempted to flee to Southeast Asia. Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia reported an increase in migrants believed to be Uighurs. The government stated the Uighurs were criminals and not refugees, and some countries complied with the government’s requests for the forcible return of Uighur asylum seekers. Human rights organizations reported some Uighurs forcibly returned had disappeared or faced mistreatment and imprisonment. Authorities denied repeated requests from the international community to confirm independently the welfare of 109 Uighurs repatriated from Thailand on July 10. RFA reported authorities forced two Uighurs forcibly repatriated from Thailand to confess publicly and undergo two months of political education after their return to the country.

There was increased pressure in official campaigns in Xinjiang to dissuade women from wearing religious clothing and men from growing beards.

Local authorities in Hotan Prefecture introduced a new policy requiring mosque entry permits at the start of Ramadan in July in order to worship at local mosques. According to the policy, Uighur men over the age of 18 could only apply for an entrance permit for the mosque in their home village, restricting the ability of Uighur Muslims to worship outside of their local communities.

According to the Kashgar Prefecture government website, 58,000 ethnic minority CCP cadres, primarily Uighur, signed the “Four Nots” pledge, which stipulated that they and their family members would not wear religious dress, including *jilbabs* and veils for women and long beards for men; participate in religious activities; listen to or disseminate religious content and publications; and apply to or participate in the Hajj.

Local authorities in Turpan, Xinjiang, reportedly fined individuals for studying the Quran in unauthorized sessions, detained people for “illegal” religious activities or carrying “illegal” religious materials, and stationed security personnel in and around mosques to restrict attendance to local residents. Authorities reportedly hung Chinese flags on mosque walls in the direction of Mecca so prayers would be directed toward the flags. On March 24, officials in Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang, ordered some local villagers to watch as workers tore down the home of a man accused of hosting an underground school for Quranic studies, according to RFA.

The media reported Muslims could apply online or through local official Islamic associations to participate in the Hajj. According to media reports, more than 14,500 Muslim citizens participated in the Hajj, consistent with 2014 numbers. Pilgrims from Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan exceeded 1,000. More than 3,000

individuals from Xinjiang also participated. These figures included China Islamic Association and security officials sent to monitor Muslim citizens and prevent unauthorized pilgrimages. Uighur Muslims reported difficulties taking part in state-sanctioned Hajj travel due to their inability to obtain travel documents in a timely manner and difficulties in meeting criteria required for participation in the official Hajj program run by the China Islamic Association. The government prohibited Uighur Muslims from making private Hajj pilgrimages outside of the government-organized program. Uighurs allowed to attend the Hajj were reportedly forced to participate in political education every day. Ethnic and religious committee staff from across Xinjiang were sent to international airports in China in June and July to ensure Uighurs were not making private Hajj pilgrimages outside of government sanctioned programs, a government source reported.

Authorities continued their “patriotic education” campaign, which in part focused on preventing any illegal religious activities in Xinjiang and prioritizing Chinese language and culture over Uighur language and culture.

Hui Muslims in Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, and Yunnan provinces engaged in religious practice with less government interference than did Uighurs, according to local sources.

Authorities continued to restrict the free printing and distribution of religious materials. The government limited distribution of Bibles to CPA and TSPM/Chinese Christian Council entities such as churches, church bookshops, and seminaries. Individuals could not order Bibles directly from publishing houses. Members of unregistered churches reported the supply and distribution of Bibles was inadequate, particularly in rural locations. According to a foreign Christian source, in the last 10 years an estimated 250 Christian bookstores and nine domestic TSPM/Chinese Christian Council publishers had opened in the country, but there were no independent domestic Christian publishers. Publishers noted that over the last year, the number of Christian titles that could be published annually had been severely limited, with only 20 new titles authorized as of October, a decrease from 80 in 2014. Christian organizations seeking to use social media and smartphone applications, however, reported that the government did not generally censor such materials.

The People’s High Court, Public Security Bureau, Bureau of Culture, and Bureau of Industry and Commerce in Xinjiang continued to implement restrictions on videos and audio recordings the government defined as promoting terrorism, religious extremism, and separatism. It was forbidden to disseminate such materials on the internet, social media, and online marketplaces. As part of these measures, the police randomly stopped individuals to check their mobile phones for any sensitive content. Many Uighurs subsequently opted to delete any religious content on their mobile devices, including Arabic audio files of Quran readings and photos featuring women in conservative religious dress, according to reports.

In June authorities sentenced Husen Imin to 10 years’ imprisonment in Aksu Prefecture under the charge of “religious extremism” for reading from the Quran at his mother’s funeral. Authorities convicted Husen of spreading “illegal religious materials” through his smartphone during a mass trial held in July and sentenced the 22-year-old to 15 years in jail in November.

Authorities often confiscated Bibles in raids on house churches.

There were reports that authorities restricted the acquisition or use of buildings for religious ceremonies and purposes.

Catholic groups also reported the forcible destruction of their buildings. In one of many examples, in May the Catholic House of Prayer in Baoding, Hebei Province, was demolished by authorities. When questioned about the destruction of churches, government officials typically claimed religious structures were not “up to local building codes.”

Authorities in Zhejiang Province ordered the demolitions of several state-sanctioned Protestant and Catholic churches and the removal of over 1,500 crosses as part of the “Three Rectifications and One Demolition” campaign targeting “illegal” structures. Church pastors and congregants openly resisted the cross removals by forming human chains to protect buildings and replacing or reattaching crosses, resulting in repeated clashes and standoffs with police. Advocacy groups said the church demolition and cross removals largely targeted churches affiliated with the TSPM and registered with the government. Christian communities reported many churches that were targeted had building permits and other official documents demonstrating their building had been approved by the proper authorities.

Authorities detained or harassed journalists reporting on actions against Catholics and other Christians in Zhejiang Province. Christian newspapers reported their websites were often shut down temporarily when trying to report on Zhejiang Province, and other journalists were physically prevented from reporting on cross demolitions in the region. Authorities detained and questioned Hong Kong journalist Jiang Yunnan in January for attempting to interview church leaders connected to the cross demolitions. In November advocacy organizations reported reporter Zan Aizong, who wrote extensively about cross removals, was detained on “suspicion of subverting state power.”

In December after months of harassment and threats, Guizhou Province officials arrested Living Stone Church Pastor Yang Hua on charges of possessing state secrets and took possession of his church's meeting space in a downtown Guiyang office building, effectively closing the church, which was the largest house church in Guizhou.

Due to the difficulty of fulfilling registration requirements, many religious organizations either remain unregistered or registered as commercial enterprises. Unregistered groups reported they were vulnerable to coercive and punitive action by SARA, the Ministry of Public Security, and other party or government security organs. In parts of the country, local authorities allowed or at least did not interfere with the activities of some unregistered groups, according to reports. Officials in many large urban areas, for example, allowed services in unregistered places of worship provided they remained small in scale and did not disrupt "social stability." In other areas, local officials punished the same activities by restricting events and meetings, confiscating and destroying property, physically assaulting and injuring participants, or imprisoning leaders and worshippers, according to reports. Some local governments continued to restrict the growth of unregistered Protestant church networks and cross-congregational affiliations.

In Xinjiang, regulations forbade minors from participating in religious activities and imposed penalties on organizations and individuals who "organize, entice, or force" minors to participate in religious activities. There were widespread reports of prohibitions on children participating in religious activities in various localities throughout Xinjiang, but observers also reported seeing children in mosques and at Friday prayers in some areas. Xinjiang authorities prohibited children from attending Islamic schools or participating in religious activities, prompting many parents who wished to provide a religious education to use nonsanctioned religious teaching centers, often run by relatives and other trusted individuals. Xinjiang officials also banned Uighur Muslim youth under the age of 18 from attending mosque and discouraged parents from teaching religion to children at home. According to the Turpan municipal government website, in April the local government raided underground religious schools and detained more than 397 "wild imams," defined as clergy illegally teaching religion, clergy who continued to preach after removal from their religious posts, and clergy violating state rules in their teachings. Xinjiang state media reported authorities forced Uighur imams in Kashgar to dance in the street en masse to the Mandarin pop song "Little Apple" and swear an oath that they would not teach religion to children.

The government continued to restrict religious education in institutions across the country. Islamic schools in Yunnan Province were reluctant to accept Uighur students out of concern they would bring unwanted attention from government authorities and negatively affect school operations, according to local sources. Kunming Islamic College, a government-affiliated seminary, posted an official announcement stating it primarily accepted students from Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou provinces, as well as the Chongqing Special Municipality. Xinjiang was not listed in the announcement. Christians also reported restrictions on their ability to speak about their faith among university students.

Individuals seeking to enroll at an official seminary or other institution of religious learning had to obtain the support of the official patriotic religious association. The government required students to demonstrate "political reliability," and political issues were included in examinations of graduates of religious schools. Protestant representatives reported that in seminaries controlled by the TSPM, officials directed faculty to engage in "theological reconstruction" to make Protestant doctrine conform to socialism. Both registered and unregistered religious groups reported a shortage of trained clergy due in part to government controls on admission to seminaries.

Catholic groups reported that the government continued to prevent the Holy See from choosing bishops in accordance with Catholic teaching and tradition. The CPA, however, occasionally allowed the Vatican discreet input into the CPA's selection process for some bishops. An estimated 90 percent of CPA bishops have reconciled with the Vatican. In some locations, however, local authorities reportedly pressured unregistered Catholic priests and believers to renounce all ordinations approved by the Holy See. Most of the Catholic bishops previously appointed by the government as CPA bishops later were elevated by the Vatican through apostolic mandates. In August Father Joseph Zhang Yinlin Anyang in Henan Province became the first Vatican- and government-approved Chinese bishop publicly ordained in three years, a move characterized as an "olive branch" toward the Holy See in Catholic media reports.

Officials continued to hold "anti-cult" education sessions and propaganda campaigns affecting school children and their families. Some officials required families to sign statements guaranteeing they would not take part in house churches and "cult organization" activities related to Falun Gong as a prerequisite for registering their children for school. The media reported government employees in Xinjiang were forced to sign guarantees they would refrain from religious or political expression. The penalty for not signing could be barring their children from entering university or being subject to administrative investigation.

Some patriotic religious association-approved Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics, and Buddhist monks were allowed to travel abroad for additional religious study. Religious workers not affiliated with

a patriotic religious association stated they faced difficulties in obtaining passports or official approval to study abroad.

Government policy continued to allow religious groups to engage in charitable work, although some religious leaders reported their groups were not allowed to share religious beliefs while conducting activities. Faith-based charities, like all other charitable groups, were required to register with the government. The government did not permit unregistered charitable groups to raise funds openly, hire employees, open bank accounts, or own property. According to several unregistered religious groups, the government required faith-based charities to obtain official co-sponsorship of the registration application by the local official religious affairs bureau. These groups often were required to affiliate with one of the five patriotic religious associations.

Registered religious groups provided social services throughout the country, but were often restricted from including religious content when providing such services. Authorities allowed certain overseas faith-based aid groups to deliver services in coordination with local authorities and domestic groups. Some unregistered religious groups reported local authorities placed limits on their ability to provide social services. On June 20, 200 police in Shenzhen disguised as volunteers forcibly closed the Christian-operated Guan'ai Center shelter for homeless and disabled persons, according to media reports. This action followed orders from the Shenzhen government to the center to cease "illegal religious activity," including putting up a cross and possessing religious publications and materials. In other provinces, such as Hebei, some registered charitable religious groups reported a positive working relationship with their local religious affairs bureau officials, allowing them to engage in disaster relief and social service activities.

Religious minorities reported increased screening at airport and train station security checks. Many practicing Tibetan Buddhists, especially monks and nuns, were denied passports and therefore unable to travel freely.

Religious groups reported religious adherents were excluded from certain employment opportunities because the CCP controlled appointments to many positions in society, including state-owned enterprises, public schools and universities, and professional organizations. In September the CCP's United Front Work Department issued public rules reaffirming the longstanding ban on party members following a faith. This ban was also enforced at the local level, with Zhejiang Province officials announcing the need to prevent the "infiltration of Western hostile forces." State-run media reported that new applicants for party membership would be vetted for religious belief and party members found to have embraced or participated in religion would be required to "rectify" their beliefs.

Foreign residents belonging to religious groups not officially recognized by the government reported being permitted to worship although, according to policy, foreigners could not proselytize, conduct religious activities at unregistered venues, or conduct religious activities with local citizens at religious venues. In many cases, authorities prohibited citizens from attending the services of religious organizations permitted to operate for foreign residents. Authorities threatened that if photos of large church meetings at the Shekou International School in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province appeared on international social media sites, the church would lose the lease on its new meeting site. The church drew hundreds of local and foreign Christians for weekly worship services, according to reports.

There were reported incidents of government interference with Falun Gong activities abroad. According to advocacy groups, government officials pressured venue managers and governments in a number of countries to limit the broadcast time of Falun Gong-associated radio stations and cancel, refuse to host, or delay dance performances by the Shen Yun Performing Arts Company, which is associated with Falun Gong.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Because religion, culture, and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity. Religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims, experienced institutionalized discrimination throughout the country both because of their religious beliefs and their status as ethnic minorities with distinct languages and cultures.

In Xinjiang, tension between Uighur Muslims and Han Chinese migrants continued, exacerbated by government policies discriminating against Uighurs. Many hospitals and businesses would not provide services to women wearing veils. Tensions also continued among ethnic and religious groups in Tibetan areas, particularly between Han Chinese and Tibetans, and, in some areas, between Tibetans and Hui Muslims.

Despite labor law provisions against discrimination in hiring based on religious belief, some employers openly discriminated against religious believers. Some Protestant Christians reported employers terminated their employment due to their religious activities. A Christian lawyer in Zhejiang Province was fired by his employer due to his religious activities, according to media reports. Muslims in Xinjiang faced discrimination in hiring, lost

their positions, and were detained by authorities for praying in their workplaces. In some instances, landlords discriminated against potential tenants based on their religious beliefs. Some unregistered churches reported that their property leases were broken by landlords pressured by the government.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. officials repeatedly and publicly expressed concerns and pressed for the expansion of religious freedom. The President reiterated the importance of religious freedom for all people, including for ethnic and religious minorities, during Chinese President's Xi Jinping's state visit to Washington in September. The President noted restrictions on churches during his discussions with President Xi. The Secretary of State raised religious freedom concerns, including the case of detained Christian lawyer Zhang Kai, during the release of the annual U.S. International Religious Freedom Report in October.

Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, regularly urged government officials at the central and local levels to implement stronger protection for religious freedom and to release prisoners of conscience. The Ambassador met with members of religious groups and religious freedom defenders and highlighted religious freedom in public speeches and private diplomacy with senior officials. In an official visit, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom raised religious freedom concerns in government meetings in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou, and urged the government to abide by its own constitution in upholding the right of religious freedom. The Department of State, the embassy, and the consulates general regularly called upon the government to release prisoners of conscience, including religious prisoners.

U.S. officials continued to meet regularly with academics, NGOs, members of registered and unregistered religious groups, and family members of religious prisoners to reinforce U.S. support for religious freedom. The Ambassador hosted events for religious leaders and practitioners to convey the importance of religious pluralism in society. The embassy supported a number of religious leaders and scholars to participate in exchange programs related to the role of religion and religious tolerance. The embassy arranged for the introduction of religious officials to members of U.S. religious communities and U.S. government agencies that engaged with those communities.

The embassy and consulates general actively engaged on religious freedom issues, regularly hosting events for the public to promote understanding and tolerance. The Guangzhou Consulate General hosted a number of speakers and conducted regular discussions on religious freedom issues. Highlights included a discussion in August on the role of the Supreme Court in safeguarding religious freedom in the United States.

Since 1999, China has been designated as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On February 29, 2016, the Secretary of State redesignated China as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing restriction on exports to China of crime control and detection instruments and equipment, under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246), pursuant to section 402(c)(5) of the Act.

published on

