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# **RUSSIA 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, other laws and policies restrict religious freedom. In practice the government generally did not restrict the activities of established Judeo-Christian religious groups, but imposed restrictions limiting the religious freedom of minority religious groups. Government actions toward these groups included detentions, raids, denial of official registration with the Ministry of Justice, denial of official building registration, denial of visas to religious workers, and extremism charges to ban religious materials and restrict groups' right to assemble. There is no state religion, but the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) received preferential consideration.

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Members of minority religious groups continued to experience harassment and occasional physical attacks. Especially after instances of extremist violence in the North Caucasus and continued media reports about the influx of Central Asian migrant workers, Muslims encountered social discrimination and antagonism in many regions of the country.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed religious freedom in consultations with government officials; he also met with religious leaders and participated in events to promote religious tolerance. Other U.S. government and embassy officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with government officials on multiple occasions. The U.S. government engaged a number of religious groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. Embassy staff actively monitored possible violations of religious freedom.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 142.5 million (July 2013 estimate). The *Atlas of Religions of Russia* reports 42.5 percent of the population is Orthodox Christian and 6.5 percent Muslim. In contrast, a 2012 Levada Center poll reports 74 percent of Russians consider themselves Orthodox while 7 percent self-identify as Muslim. Religious groups constituting less than 5 percent each include Buddhists, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, Bahais, Hare Krishnas, pagans, Tengrists, Scientologists, and Falun Gong adherents. The 2010

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census estimates the number of Jews at 150,000; however, according to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia, there may be 750,000 Jews, most of whom live in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Immigrants and migrant workers from Central Asia are mostly Muslim. The majority of Muslims live in the Volga Ural region and the North Caucasus. Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia also have sizable Muslim populations.

### **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

#### **Legal/Policy Framework**

The constitution provides for religious freedom, but other laws and policies, including the law banning “extremism” and the new law on “offending the religious feelings of believers” restrict religious freedom, particularly for members of minority religious groups.

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

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

The law states that those who violate religious freedom will be “punished to the fullest extent possible,” but does not specify the penalty nor under what circumstances it is to be imposed. The administrative violations code and the criminal code both punish obstruction of the right to freedom of conscience and belief.

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The law creates three categories of religious associations with different levels of legal status and privileges: groups, local organizations, and centralized organizations. Religious groups or organizations may be subject to legal dissolution or deprivation of legal status by a court decision on grounds including violations of standards set forth in the constitution and violation of public security. According to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), there are 29,831 registered religious associations (including all three categories) operating in the country.

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

A “local religious organization” (LRO) can register if it has at least 10 citizen members and is either a branch of a centralized organization or has existed in the locality as a religious group for at least 15 years. According to a previous ruling by the European Court of Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), this requirement violates the European Convention on Human Rights provisions on the freedoms of religion and association. LROs have legal status and may open bank accounts, own property, issue invitation letters to foreign guests, publish literature, receive tax benefits, and conduct worship services in prisons, state-owned hospitals, and the armed forces.

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

Foreign religious associations have the right to open offices for representation purposes.

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

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

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

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

Incitement to discord is punishable by up to four years in prison. Being a member of a banned group designated as extremist is punishable by up to six years in prison. Possession of material considered extremist can result in 15 days' imprisonment or a fine of 3,000 rubles (\$91). Courts may suspend for 90 days the operations of legal entities found to be in possession of extremist materials and fine them 100,000 rubles (\$3,040).

By law publications declared extremist by any court, including local and district courts, are automatically added to the federal list of extremist materials. Courts order internet service providers to block access to websites containing materials listed on the federal list of extremist materials. There is no legal procedure for

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removal from the list, even when a court declares an item is no longer classified as extremist.

A law passed in July by the State Duma increases maximum fines and prison sentences under the anti-extremism law. Under the new law, “actions directed to incite hatred or enmity” can be punished by fines from 300,000 to 500,000 rubles (\$9,100 to \$15,200) and forced labor up to four years. Organizing or participating in an extremist organization carries a fine of up to 500,000 rubles (\$15,200) or a prison term of up to six years.

Under the law, an individual convicted of committing an act of vandalism motivated by ideological, political, national, racial, or religious hatred or enmity can be sentenced to up to three years in prison.

Legislation passed by the State Duma on June 11 criminalizes offending the religious feelings of believers (“blasphemy law”). According to the new law, “actions in public, demonstrating clear disrespect for society and committed with the intent to insult the religious feelings of believers,” are subject to fines of up to 300,000 rubles (\$9,100), or prison sentences of up to one year.

Another new law makes it illegal for foreign citizens, stateless persons, and those convicted of extremism, to lead, be members of, or participate in religious organizations.

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

The government’s nonimmigrant visa rules allow certain foreigners with tourist, private, business, or humanitarian visas to remain in the country for up to six months, but religious workers are allowed to spend no more than 90 of every 180 days in the country.

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

The ROC is the only religious organization allowed to review draft legislation pending before the State Duma.

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Religious education classes are compulsory in all secondary schools, including public schools. Students may take a course on one of the four “traditional” religions, a general world religions course, or a secular ethics course.

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

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

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

There is 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, while alternative service is 18 months in a Ministry of Defense agency and 21 months in a non-defense agency.

### Government Practices

There were reports of imprisonment, detention, and degrading treatment of members of religious minorities. The government arbitrarily applied anti-extremism laws, refused to register certain religious organizations, and imposed other restrictions that infringed on the religious freedoms of members of minority religious groups, in particular Muslims, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, Scientologists, and Falun Gong practitioners. The Federation of Jewish Communities reported no official acts of anti-Semitism at the federal level.

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Authorities frequently detained and imprisoned members of minority religions because of their religious beliefs, sometimes pursuing criminal charges against individuals for attending religious services or carrying out peaceful religious activities.

There were reports authorities subjected individuals to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment because of their religious beliefs. In March a group of approximately two dozen Azeri, Tajik, Kazakh, and Uzbek men were detained and some forced to cut their own beards off at gunpoint by OMON (SWAT) troops in Surgut, Khanty-Mansiysk. According to representatives of the Tajik diaspora in Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug, an OMON unit in combat gear approached the group as they were dining in a cafe near the city's mosque, forced them to the floor, demanded their documents, and forced some to cut off their own beards. Reportedly, those who refused were threatened with having their beards burned off.

The authorities continued to ban Nurjular, an alleged religious association of followers of Sunni Muslim theologian Said Nursi, after concluding Nursi's works were extremist and promoted intolerance. Muslim adherents of Nursi (generally referred to as "Nursi readers") and religious rights advocates continued to assert there was no Nurjular organization. In March authorities in St. Petersburg raided the home of Nursi reader Shirazi Bekirov, as well as the homes of six other Nursi readers. More than 10 people were detained and thousands of Nursi's books were seized as extremist literature. Bekirov was found guilty of organizing the activity of the banned Nurjular organization and sentenced to six months in prison, following a lengthy detention and a psychiatric evaluation.

In April, 16 Jehovah's Witnesses were charged in Rostov with organizing and participating in the activities of an organization banned for extremist activity. The charges followed a 2009 decision by the Rostov Regional Court to dissolve the Taganrog Jehovah's Witnesses LRO, claiming the religion was an extremist organization. The charges arose from the act of attending a religious service. In October authorities announced they were investigating five more Jehovah's Witnesses from Rostov-on-Don on the same charges.

Police across the country participated in raids on minority religious groups at private homes and places of worship, often confiscating religious literature and other property.

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In January and February investigators in Tobolsk conducted at least 15 searches of private homes of Jehovah's Witnesses, seizing religious literature, computers, and storage equipment.

In July over 20 officers from the Center for Counteracting Terrorism and the police raided a religious service at Setun Culture Hall with a signed order, interrupting the service to search the premises for evidence that Jehovah's Witnesses advocate the superiority of their religious beliefs over others. The senior officer announced to the approximately 150 members he was terminating the religious service, and detained five of the men for questioning at the police station. During the investigation, one senior police officer made offensive and derogatory remarks, which were recorded, towards the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Experts criticized the Duma's action in passing legislation strengthening existing extremism laws, despite an expression of concern in 2012 by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe that the vague definition of "extremism" lent itself to broad interpretation and arbitrary application by authorities. The experts saw the law as a potential tool for the government to use against minority "foreign" Christian religious groups such as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, as well as against alleged extremist Muslim organizations with ties to Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Religious minorities said local authorities utilized the country's anti-extremism laws to ban sacred and essential religious texts. As of October 1, the MOJ's list of extremist materials had grown to 2,096 titles, including 69 Jehovah's Witnesses items, four Falun Gong items, and seven Scientology items. Publications declared extremist by a court were automatically added to the list.

In April a court in Orenburg continued deliberations regarding 68 Islamic works it banned in 2012, the largest such ban of religious literature in a single court case. While no final court ruling was issued, officials filed administrative cases against the owner and a salesperson of a bookstore selling some of the works.

On August 7, the Central District Court of Tver pronounced the Jehovah's Witnesses website to be extremist, requiring Russian internet service providers to block access to the site and making accessing a criminal offense. According to Jehovah's Witnesses lawyers, this marked the first time any country legally banned the group's website.

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On December 17, the Krasnodar regional court overturned a September ruling by a district court in Novorossiysk that a translation of the Quran by Elmir Kuliyeu was extremist and should be included on the federal list of banned literature. The Krasnodar judge remarked that the initial examination of the translation was made incorrectly by people lacking expertise.

In July journalists in Sverdlovsk Oblast reported a number of anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and anti-Buddhist works remained for sale in ROC bookstores in Yekaterinburg.

Minority religious groups stated authorities had used the threat of extremism charges as a means to extract money from them. There were reports of regional prosecutors advising religious groups that court cases were in preparation to declare religious texts extremist and the only way to avoid such charges would be to hire specific “experts” at exorbitant prices to conduct “expert analyses” of the texts.

The government continued to refuse to register certain religious organizations and subsequently penalized them for failing to register.

Although foreign religious representative offices were required to register in order to conduct religious services and other activities, many such offices opened without registering, or avoided registration requirements by being accredited to a registered religious organization.

In August the Moscow City Court upheld the MOJ’s notices of violation issued to the Church of Scientology of Moscow. Among other issues, the ministry had required the church to re-register its 1994 religious charter, while at the same time asserting the government did not recognize the religious nature of the organization’s activities. The church argued it had already attempted to re-register 11 times and had been denied every time.

Many religious organizations reported authorities had prevented them from renting or obtaining venues for hosting religious services and assemblies from public or private vendors.

In April the first deputy chief of the Chelyabinsk city administration sent a letter to the heads of the directorates for culture, education, youth affairs, social development, and sports and tourism, instructing them to refuse requests by

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Jehovah's Witnesses to rent a venue to conduct a regional assembly in Chelyabinsk.

In November a similar letter from the governor of Kemerov to the regional Department of Culture that highlighted the "harmful influence" of Pentecostals requested the department strengthen its ties with the ROC and strengthen control over the administration of public buildings and spaces so as to prevent such religious groups from using them.

Officials also prevented religious organizations from obtaining land and denied construction permits for houses of worship.

During the year authorities denied multiple requests for land plots on which mosques would be built. Lack of access to adequate places of worship and increased membership meant many Muslim groups spilled out onto the street during Friday prayers and had to rent special premises for major holidays. The mayor of Moscow stated in March there would be no new mosques in Moscow beyond the four existing mosques, despite the city's estimated two million Muslims.

Muslims outside of Moscow also reported persistent difficulties building mosques to meet growing numbers of Muslim worshippers. Sochi, a city in which 20,000 Muslims reside, continued to have no mosque, with officials stating a mosque 50 miles away was sufficient for the needs of the city's Muslims. During the year authorities denied multiple requests for land plots on which to build a mosque. In April authorities denied permission to build a mosque in Novokuznetsk after locals protested it was too close to a Russian Orthodox Church and demanded a halt to the "Islamization" of the region.

The Moscow government originally approved a plan for the Krishna community to build a new temple on a plot of land in the sparsely populated outskirts of the city, after forcibly evicting them from their centrally-located temple in July. The mayor's office, however, withdrew permission after the Krishna community had already spent 70 million rubles (\$2.1 million) on planning and construction of the new temple, despite objections from both the federal and local human rights ombudsmen.

Some regional officials used contradictions between federal and local laws and varying interpretations of the law to restrict the activities of minority religious groups. The federal government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse

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discrimination at the local level. Some local authorities broadly interpreted the law prohibiting unsanctioned demonstrations to restrict public worship. Several Muslim groups reported insistence by local government officials that public worship in spaces not designated for religious purposes required advance clearance.

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

In January the Federal Migration Service began allowing applicants for work permits “whose religious beliefs forbid appearance in public with their head uncovered” to wear hijabs in permit photos as long as their faces remained fully uncovered.

Although the government generally paid compensation in line with ECHR decisions, it continued to ignore judgments in cases where the ECHR found credible violations of the rights of minority religious groups and to fail to amend legislation to bring it into compliance with ECHR rulings.

The government continued to decline to comply with an ECHR ruling that the requirement for a religious group to have existed in a community for at least 15 years in order to be registered as an LRO violated the European Convention on Human Rights’ provisions on the freedoms of religion and association. The Ministry of Justice, however, admitted the requirement did not conform to the European convention and submitted a draft law to eliminate the requirement, although without result as of year’s end.

Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin and Religious Affairs Director Mikhail Odintsov made public statements in support of the rights of religious minorities, advocating the equality of all religions before the law in a secular state. The ombudsman’s office received approximately 500 complaints from religious organizations over the course of the year, mostly concerning anti-extremist legislation, allocation of land for construction of religious buildings, and religious literature expertise. Lukin frequently interceded on behalf of those filing complaints.

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

The ROC had a number of formal and informal agreements with government ministries giving it greater access than other religious organizations to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, police, and the military forces. The government also provided the Russian Orthodox patriarch with security guards and access to official vehicles, a privilege accorded no other religious organization.

In January the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) won an appeal of an arbitration court's decision to award 800-year-old saints' relics to the Federal Property Management Agency in Suzdal on the grounds that the general courts, and not the arbitration court, had jurisdiction. Despite the victory, the court ordered the relics seized in order to "ensure the safety of the property." Police interrupted a church service to take possession of the relics, pushing Metropolitan Theodore away from the relics in the middle of a prayer. The ROAC continued to state it was subject to systematic discrimination by authorities because of its refusal to acknowledge the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate.

In May Jehovah's Witnesses submitted a request to the Gorodetskiy District of the Nizhniy Novgorod region to rent a stadium for a convention. The request was denied after the administration consulted an Orthodox priest, who stated he considered Gorodets an important Orthodox spiritual center.

On August 17, riot police and members of the activist Russian Orthodox organization God's Will dispersed a procession of the satirical Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster as they marched through Moscow. Police detained eight members of the group and charged them with organizing an unsanctioned rally. They could face additional charges under the new blasphemy law, after God's Will members accused the group of "insulting the religious feelings of believers."

Despite its cooperative relationship with the government, the ROC experienced complications in obtaining restitution of many of its pre-revolution structures because the government had acquired them and sold them to private entities.

The Federation of Jewish Communities stated there were no official acts of anti-Semitism at the federal level. There were reports, however, of isolated cases of anti-Semitism by government officials.

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In July Perm Krai authorities denied the local Jewish community's request for a land plot in the city center for the construction of a new synagogue. The request had initially been supported by the local government before popular discontent with the project led to a reversal.

In August the Tver regional court sentenced Ilya Farber, a rural Jewish schoolteacher, to seven years in prison and a three million ruble (\$91,300) fine for accepting a bribe of 430,000 rubles (\$13,100). During the trial public prosecutor Pavel Vereshchagin responded to Farber's claims that he was innocent and simply trying to help the community by asking the jury, "How could a person with the surname Farber help villagers for free?"

The Ministry of Justice added numerous anti-Semitic items to its list of "extremist" materials, including an audio clip entitled "Kill the Jews – Save Russia" and informational material labeled "The Rape and Murder of a Three-year old Girl According to the Canons of Judaism."

As of September 1, 83 chaplain positions had been filled in the Ministry of Defense chaplaincy program, including 80 Orthodox, two Muslim, and one Buddhist chaplain. The program remained under development.

### **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 physical attacks on individuals and groups because of religious affiliation. Because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance. Especially after instances of extremist violence in the North Caucasus and following media reports of an influx of Central Asian migrant workers, Muslims encountered social discrimination and antagonism in many regions of the country, including physical attacks against traditionally Muslim ethnic groups. Non-ROC Christian groups also faced harassment and occasional physical attacks.

Violence against moderate religious leaders in the North Caucasus continued. Since January 2012, 12 Muslim leaders have been killed, the majority moderate clerics critical of radical Islamic theology. In August masked gunmen in Dagestan shot and killed Imam Ilyas Ilyasov, a religious leader known for his strong stance against radical Islam in the North Caucasus.

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In July gunmen shot and seriously wounded Rabbi Ovadia Isakov outside of his home in Derbent, Dagestan. Following the shooting, Chief Rabbi of Russia Berel Lazar stated the attack, as well as previous attacks on Muslim leaders who called for interethnic and interreligious peace, was intended to destabilize the whole of society.

Activists and religious groups claiming ties to the ROC disseminated publications casting minority religions in a negative light, staged demonstrations, and threatened and physically attacked members of minority religious groups. According to Ilnur Sharapov, a lawyer with the human rights organization Agora, the activities of such groups became “increasingly criminal” and continued to go unpunished, due to the relationship between the government and the ROC.

Minority religious organizations reported repeated acts of harassment ranging from verbal to physical abuse when conducting missionary work in more remote areas of the country. In September a group of 60 residents of a large apartment complex in Velikiy Novgorod asked authorities to intervene and remove Mormon residents from the complex. They asked authorities to “protect their children from the destructive influence of the sect.”

The SOVA Center, a nonprofit organization tracking extremism and racism, reported 94 acts of vandalism motivated by religious, ethnic, or ideological hatred in 39 regions of the country during the year. Acts of vandalism against religious sites included 38 attacks against Orthodox churches and 12 attacks against Jehovah’s Witnesses facilities.

Anti-Semitic literature and publications were sold and distributed, and some anti-Semitic remarks were published in mainstream media. In the May 15 edition of the popular newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda, columnist Ulyana Skoibeda opined, “sometimes you’re sorry that the Nazis didn’t turn the ancestors of today’s liberals into lampshades.” Her comment was in response to a blog post by Leonid Gozman, a Jewish politician, critical of a TV show that glorified what he considered to be a particularly violent and repressive Soviet wartime counterintelligence agency.

According to the SOVA Center, the total number of neo-Nazi groups was difficult to track because most had no more than 12 members; the center estimated there were 15,000 to 20,000 active members of neo-Nazi groups nationwide. Nationalist groups organized “Russian Marches” in over 70 cities throughout the country on National Unity Day on November 4. At the Russian March in Moscow, some of

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the approximately 20,000 attendees displayed banners with Nazi and Hitler Youth emblems and gave the Nazi salute. Police arrested 30 for chanting Nazi slogans and displaying “banned symbols.”

Recorded desecration and vandalism of Jewish objects and facilities increased to 10 incidents, up from eight in 2012. On March 9, two unidentified men threw a Molotov cocktail into a building of the Jewish Community Center in Perm, the day before a peace march dedicated to the introduction of a new Torah scroll. In October unidentified persons fired shots at a synagogue in Yekaterinburg. One window was damaged but no one was injured.

Through the Inter-Religious Council of the Russian Federation, the ROC maintained a cordial relationship with representatives of Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, the other “traditional” religions. The Christian Consultative Committee facilitated dialogue among religious organizations and with the government.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. government engaged government officials, religious groups and organizations, NGOs, and religious freedom advocates in regular discussions on religious freedom. The Ambassador and embassy officers met with a range of government officials, including government Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin, to raise concerns over new legislation affecting religious freedom. Embassy and other U.S. officials discussed religious freedom with the leaders of both “traditional” and minority religious groups.

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

Embassy officials raised consular cases involving possible violations of religious freedom of U.S. citizens with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They also met with representatives of the MOJ to discuss the law on extremism, registration of religious organizations, and the contents of the Federal List of Extremist Material.

Because U.S. missionaries and religious workers constituted a significant component of the local U.S. citizen population, the embassy inquired about the missionaries’ experiences with immigration, registration, and police authorities as a gauge of religious freedom.

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The Ambassador met with ROC Patriarch Kirill in January to mark the fourth anniversary of his enthronement as patriarch and to discuss the role of the ROC in Russian society. The Ambassador also met with Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the ROC's Department of External Relations, in February and December to discuss topics including ROC-state relations and interfaith cooperation.

In January the Ambassador delivered a speech at a candle-lighting ceremony in remembrance of Holocaust survivors at the Jewish Community Center. He also met with Rabbi Berel Lazar, chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities, on multiple occasions over the course of the year and with the CEO of the World Jewish Congress to discuss the state of Judaism in Russia.

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

Embassy officers and other U.S. officials also met with civil society and human rights leaders regarding freedom of religion. The groups included Forum 18, Portal-Credo, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, the Institute of Europe, and the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis.