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2010 Report on International Religious Freedom - Uzbekistan

[Covers the period from July 1, 2009, to June 30, 2010]

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and for the principle of separation of church and state; however, the 1998 religion law restricts many rights only to registered religious groups and limits which groups may register. Violators of the law's prohibitions on activities such as proselytizing, importing and disseminating religious literature, and offering private religious instruction are subject to criminal penalties.

Respect for religious freedom declined in several areas during the reporting period. An estimated 141 members of Nur, a Turkish Muslim group deemed "extremist" by the government, were convicted during the reporting period, with sentences ranging from six to 12 years. Three high-profile crimes that occurred in summer 2009 prompted police to arrest hundreds of alleged religious extremists; although some were arrested in connection with the crimes, many others were arrested solely for membership in banned religious groups. Police raided several Christian and Baha'i services, and many members of minority religious groups faced heavy fines and/or short jail terms for violations of restrictive religion laws. The government did not interfere with worshippers at sanctioned mosques and permitted the regular operation of religious groups traditionally practicing in the country, including the Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Russian Orthodox communities. Some minority religious groups remained unregistered because they were unable to satisfy the strict registration requirements set out by law. These groups, particularly those perceived as engaging in proselytism, experienced raids, harassment, and the detention of their leaders and members; some faced criminal charges.

Uzbek society is generally tolerant of religious groups, and religious groups were generally tolerant of each other. Neighbors, family, and employers sometimes pressure ethnic Uzbek Christians, especially recent converts and residents of smaller communities, to reconvert. Some minority religious groups faced continued negative coverage in the largely state-controlled media.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy remained engaged in monitoring and advocating for religious freedom and maintained contact with government and religious leaders and human rights activists. On January 16, 2009, the secretary of state redesignated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 172,742 square miles and a population of 28.2 million. Approximately 80 percent of the population is ethnic Uzbek, 5.5 percent Russian, 5 percent Tajik, 3 percent Kazakh, 2.5 percent Karakalpak, and 1.5 percent Tatar. The government reported that an estimated 93 percent of the population is nominally Muslim (the vast majority of which is Sunni Muslim, of the Hanafi school, with perhaps 1 percent Shi'a Muslims, who are concentrated in the provinces of Bukhara and Samarkand). Approximately 4 percent is Russian Orthodox, a percentage that declines as ethnic Russians and other Slavs continue to emigrate. The remaining 3 percent includes small communities of Roman Catholics, Korean Christians, Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists, evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Buddhists, Baha'is, and Hare Krishnas, as well as atheists. In addition an estimated 10,000 Ashkenazi and Bukharan Jews remain, concentrated in the cities of Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. At least 80,000 Jews emigrated to Israel and the United States over the past two decades, mainly for economic reasons.

As of June 1, 2010, there were 2,225 registered religious organizations of 16 religious denominations, including 2,050 Muslim (including mosques, educational institutions, and Islamic centers) and 175 Christian groups. This is a decrease of two from the 2,228 recorded in 2008. Among the Muslim groups were several Shi'a congregations. The number of registered Christian groups decreased by four. Registered minority religious groups include 52 Korean Christian, 37 Russian Orthodox, 23 Baptist, 21 Pentecostal ("Full Gospel"), 10 Seventh-day Adventist, eight Jewish, five Roman Catholic, six Baha'i, two Lutheran, four "New Apostolic," two Armenian Apostolic, one Jehovah's Witnesses, one Krishna Consciousness, one Temple of Buddha, one Christian "Voice of God" Church, and one interconfessional Bible Society.

A growing percentage of Muslims and Russian Orthodox adherents actively practice their religion. Mosque attendance remains high, particularly among younger men, who constitute the majority of worshippers.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion; however, the government and laws restrict these rights in practice. The constitution also establishes the principle of separation of church and state. The government prohibits religious groups from forming political parties and social movements.

The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations (1998 religion law) provides for freedom of worship, freedom from religious persecution, separation of church and state, and the right to establish schools and train clergy; however, the law grants those rights only to registered groups. It also restricts religious rights that are judged to be in conflict with national security, prohibits proselytizing, bans religious subjects in public schools, prohibits the private teaching of religious principles, and requires religious groups to obtain a license to publish or distribute materials. The Committee on Religious Affairs (CRA), a government agency accountable to the Cabinet of Ministers, must approve all religious literature.

The 1998 religion law requires all religious groups to register and provides strict and burdensome criteria for registration. Among its requirements, the law stipulates that each group must present a list of at least 100 citizen members to the local branch of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). The CRA oversees registered religious activity.

The law prohibits religious groups from training religious personnel if the group does not have a registered central administrative body. Registration of a central body requires registered religious groups to be present in eight of the 13 provinces, an impossible requirement for most minority religious groups. There are six entities that may legally train religious personnel. The law limits religious instruction to officially sanctioned religious schools and state-approved instructors. The

law permits no private religious instruction and imposes fines for violations. The law prohibits the teaching of religious subjects in public schools. Article 14 of the religion law prohibits the wearing of "cult robes" (religious clothing) in public places by all except "those serving in religious organizations."

The criminal and administrative codes contain stiff penalties for violating the religion law and other statutes on religious activities. In addition to the prohibited activities that include organizing an illegal religious group, the law also proscribes persuading others to join such a group and drawing minors into a religious organization without the permission of their parents. Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal.

The criminal code formally distinguishes between "illegal" groups, which are those that are not registered properly, and "prohibited" groups viewed as extremist, which the government bans altogether. The code makes it a criminal offense, punishable by up to five years in prison, to organize an illegal religious group or to resume the activities of such a group after it has been denied registration or ordered to disband. In addition the code punishes participation in such a group with up to three years in prison. The code also provides penalties of up to 20 years in prison for "organizing or participating" in the activities of religious extremist, fundamentalist, separatist, or other prohibited groups.

The main laws under which authorities charge citizens for religious activity are article 159 (anticonstitutional activity); article 216 (illegal establishment of public associations or religious organizations); article 216, section 2 (violation of legislation on religious organizations, including proselytism); article 244, section 1 (production and distribution of materials that create a threat to public security and public order); and article 244, section 2 (establishment, direction of, or participation in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist, or other banned organizations) of the criminal code.

The criminal code (article 217, section 2) and administrative code (article 201) increase the fines for repeat offenses of violations of the law on religious activity to 200 to 300 times the minimum monthly wage of approximately \$25 (37,680 soums) under the criminal code and 50 to 100 times the minimum wage under the administrative code. After a person is convicted under the administrative code, he or she may be tried under the criminal code for a repeat offense.

Authorities also use four provisions of the administrative code to impose administrative penalties for violations of laws regulating religious activities. Article 201 of the administrative code imposes fines on violators of the law on how religious organizations should operate as well as for holding illegal public rallies, marches, and demonstrations. Article 202 imposes fines for "creating the conditions" for holding unsanctioned meetings. Article 240 of the administrative code imposes administrative fines for violating the religion law, and article 241 imposes fines for "teaching religious doctrines without specialist religious education and without the permission of an agency of the central administration of a religious organization, and equally teaching religious doctrines in a private capacity."

June 2006 amendments to the administrative code punish "illegal production, storage, import, or distribution of materials of religious content," with a fine of 20 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for individuals, or 50 to 100 times the minimum monthly wage for officials of organizations, together with confiscation of the materials and the "corresponding means of producing and distributing them." Criminal code article 244, section 3, addresses the same offense, punishing those already convicted under the corresponding article of the administrative code with a fine of 100 to 200 times the minimum monthly wage or corrective labor of up to three years. Other changes introduced simultaneously to the criminal and administrative codes punish those convicted of the production and distribution of "literature promoting racial and religious hatred."

Although the law treats all centrally registered religious denominations equally, the government funds an Islamic university and the preservation of Islamic historic sites. The government provided logistical support for selected Muslims to participate in the November 2009 Hajj, but pilgrims pay their own expenses. The government controls the muftiate, which in turn controls the Muslim hierarchy, the content of imams' sermons, and the volume and substance of published Islamic materials.

The Kurbon Hayit and Roza Hayit Islamic holy days are observed as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There were significant governmental restrictions on religious freedom during the reporting period. By continuing to deny registration to some religious groups, the government effectively deprived them of their legal right to worship, as provided in the constitution. The government restricted many religious practices and activities, punishing some citizens because they engaged in religious practices in violation of registration laws.

The government bans Islamic organizations it deems extremist and criminalizes membership in them. Chief among the banned organizations are Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), Akromiya, Tabligh Jamaat, and groups the government broadly labeled "Wahhabi." In practice, Nur is also considered a banned organization. The government states that it does not consider repression of persons or groups suspected of extremism to be a matter of religious freedom, but rather of preventing armed resistance to the government.

The HT Islamist political movement remained banned under the extremism law. Because HT is primarily a political organization, albeit motivated by religious ideology, and because it does not condemn terrorist acts by other groups, authorities' actions to restrict HT and prosecute its members are not a restriction on religious freedom per se. However, convictions of individuals associated with HT and similar organizations have lacked due process and have also involved credible allegations of torture. The number of convictions of HT members has decreased for the third consecutive year.

Nur was founded by Kurdish Mullah Said Nursi after World War I and promoted the adoption of Shari'a (Islamic law) in Turkey. In recent years, Nur has become associated with the religious and Pan-Turkish ideology of Turkish scholar Fethullah Gullen, who resides in the United States. After the Central Asian states gained independence, Gullen supported the opening of Turkish high schools throughout Central Asia, including Uzbekistan. Nur's publications were freely available in Uzbekistan in the 1990s. The Turkish schools continue to operate elsewhere in Central Asia, but authorities forced the Uzbek Turkish schools to close in 1999 following a series of bombings in Tashkent blamed on a former Uzbek opposition figure living in Turkey at the time. In the same year, the government harassed and imprisoned some Nur members in a general crackdown on independent Muslim activity. Arrests of Nur members started in larger numbers in 2006, when the government claims Nur businessmen came from Turkey and resumed their activities in Uzbekistan.

During the reporting period, the government continued its crackdown on suspected Nur members, leading to dozens of arrests and lengthy imprisonments. Outside the country, views of Nur's ideology range from progressive to conservative, but the group has consistently condemned violent extremism. Despite this, Nur remained a banned religious organization within the country.

The government has repressed and prosecuted members of "Akromiya" (Akromiylar) since 1997; however, there were no known convictions of persons for membership in Akromiya during the reporting period. Religious experts claim that Akromiya is an informal association that promotes business along the lines of Islamic religious principles, while the government claims that the group is a branch or splinter of HT and that it attempted, with the terrorist group the Islamic Movement of

Uzbekistan (IMU), to overthrow the government through armed rebellion in Andijon in 2005.

Tabligh Jamaat, an Islamic missionary group with origins in South Asia, follows worship, dress, and grooming practices based on practices from the time of the Prophet Muhammad; its members claim to be exclusively religious and apolitical. The government, however, continues to repress and prosecute members of the Tahligh Jamaat. During the reporting period, a group of 17 alleged Tahligh Jamaat members were convicted in one trial, marking the first conviction of such a large group of defendants for Tahligh Jamaat membership.

The government also bans alleged "Wahhabists," a term the government uses to describe Muslims whose intellectual or religious roots derive from the strict teachings of prominent imams of the early 1990s. Imams Obid-kori Nazarov, Nemat Parpiev, and Abduvali Mirzaev are among these. Nazarov was granted political asylum abroad; the others disappeared in custody. The government remained deeply suspicious of Muslims who worship outside state-approved institutions, who were educated at madrassahs abroad, who gather socially to discuss religious issues, or who are tied to known "Wahhabi" imams.

The government bans as extremist eight lesser-known religiously-based organizations. In addition the government bans participation in terrorist organizations, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) (also known as Islamic Movement of Turkestan) and its splinter group, the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) (also called Islamic Jihad Group (IJG)). In several trials during the reporting period, the government accused defendants of being "jihadists," but it was not clear whether the government considered them members of IJU or whether the government used the term generically to mean "extremist."

The government reported that during the reporting period, the CRA denied one registration application for having insufficient documentation, and did not deregister any religious organizations.

After facing difficulties gaining registration in previous years, no known mosques applied for registration during the reporting period. Several mosques that had reported registration problems in past years remained unregistered despite having the required number of congregants. The local NGO Expert Working Group reported that in January 2010, officials in the Andijon region closed a total of 28 mosques in three different villages after finding them to be operating illegally. These included 11 mosques in Khujaobod, 10 in Balikchi, and seven in Jalolqudoq. Several of the facilities were to be sold at auction; others were turned into workshops, children's facilities, and warehouses; two were given to local mahallah (neighborhood) committees; and one was ordered destroyed. The unregistered kanaka (Sufi monastery) that was previously allowed to operate in Kokand was closed following the death of its leader. Two madrassahs in the Ferghana Valley remained closed after the government converted them into medical facilities in previous years.

Minority religious groups continued to have difficulties registering during the reporting period. Since 1996 the Government has denied or left pending Jehovah's Witnesses applications to register congregations in Tashkent at least 23 times and to register congregations in the provinces 13 times. The Tashkent registration application submitted in the previous reporting period remained under appeal. Of the several Jehovah's Witnesses groups in the country, only one, in Chirchik, had registered status at the end of the reporting period.

In October 2008 the Tashkent City Justice Department, citing technicalities, rejected the latest application for registration from the Eskhol Full Gospel Church. The church was denied registration in July 2008 after the Tashkent City Justice Department rejected letters of support the church had procured from the Chilanazar district Hokimiyat (administration) and the mahalla committee, claiming that the letters did not "correspond to official requirements." Authorities had denied registration to the church on three previous occasions.

No Baptist church has successfully registered since 1999, and since 2000, four Baptist churches have lost their registered status. Baptist Union churches in Gulistan in Syrdarya province and in Gazalkent, Krasnogorsk, and Toy Tepa in Tashkent province attempted to register several times in the past few years without success.

Other churches remained unregistered after unsuccessful past efforts to register. These include Bethany Baptist Church in the Mirzo-Ulugbek district of Tashkent; the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik; Roman Catholic churches in Navoi and Angren; Emmanuel Church and Mir (Peace) Church of Nukus, Karakalpakstan; Hushkhabar Church in Gulistan; the Pentecostal church in Andijon; and the Adventist church, Greater Grace Christian Church, Central Protestant Church, and Miral Protestant Church, all in Samarkand. Other congregations did not face similar difficulties. The Russian Orthodox Church reported no registration problems, and in January 2010 a new Roman Catholic church reportedly opened in the religiously diverse city of Bukhara.

Religious activity remained particularly difficult in Karakalpakstan, as no non-Muslim and non-Orthodox religious communities had official registration status. The last registered Protestant church in Karakalpakstan, Emmanuel Pentecostal Church, lost its registration in 2005. More than 20 Protestant and Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in the region have been refused legal status, making their activity illegal.

Authorities in Karakalpakstan reportedly ordered Christian books, including the Bible, to be destroyed following raids on Christian meetings. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported that Karakalpak authorities also stated that Bibles must individually be registered with the RAC.

During the reporting period, many churches, particularly evangelical churches with ethnic Uzbek members, did not apply or reapply for registration because they did not expect local officials to register them. Other groups, including those with too few members, reported that they preferred not to bring themselves to the attention of authorities by submitting a registration application that obviously would not meet legal requirements. Some groups did not want to give the authorities a list of their members, especially ethnic Uzbeks, as they were harassed during previous attempts to register. A few groups refused on principle to seek registration because they challenge the government's right to require it.

To register, a group must report in its charter a valid legal address. In previous reporting periods, local officials denied approval of legal addresses or did not answer such requests, thus preventing religious groups from registering. The MOJ also cited this requirement in explaining local officials' decisions. Some groups, such as the Tashkent International Church, were reluctant to purchase property without assurance that their registration would be approved. Others claimed that local officials arbitrarily withheld approval of the addresses because they opposed the existence of Christian churches with ethnic Uzbek members.

Other problems that prevented registration included claims of falsified congregation lists; problems certifying addresses; improper certification by fire inspectors, sanitation workers, and epidemiologists; grammatical errors in the Uzbek text of a group's charter; and other technicalities.

The government does not prohibit a person from changing his or her religion, but there was social pressure, particularly among the majority Muslim population, not to do so. Ethnic Russians, Jews, and non-Muslim foreigners enjoyed greater freedom to choose and change their religion than did members of Muslim ethnic groups, particularly ethnic Uzbeks. Christian churches that did not attempt to win converts among ethnic Uzbeks generally were able to operate more freely than others.

The private teaching of religious principles and the teaching of religion to minors without parental consent is illegal. Only a religious group with a registered central office may legally provide religious instruction.

There are 11 madrassahs (including two for women), which provide secondary education on a full range of secular subjects. The Cabinet of Ministers considers diplomas granted by madrassahs equivalent to other diplomas, enabling graduates of those institutions to continue their education at the university level. In addition the Islamic Institute and Islamic University in Tashkent provide higher education. The curriculum in the madrassahs and Islamic Institute is oriented toward those planning to become imams or religious teachers. At the government-funded and -established Tashkent Islamic University, students pursue religious studies from a secular perspective, which does not qualify graduates to practice as imams; however, some graduates of the university have been appointed as imams after pursuing a standard sequence of study at a madrassah. There is no other officially sanctioned religious instruction for individuals interested in learning about Islam. In response to strong demand, however, women's groups have been started at Tashkent Islamic University and the Islamic Institute, as well as at one men's madrassah in the Kashkadarya region.

Due to increased government attention to unauthorized instruction in Islam, imams no longer informally offer religious education, a practice that, although technically illegal, local authorities sometimes allowed in the past.

The government restricts Shi'a Islamic education by not permitting the separate training of Shi'a imams inside the country and by not recognizing such education received outside the country. The Russian Orthodox Church operates two monasteries (one for women, one for men) and a seminary, and offers Sunday school education through many of its churches. Other religious groups offer religious education through their religious centers. The Jewish community has no rabbinate, because it does not have synagogues in eight different provinces and therefore cannot meet the requirements for a registered central office. It has also struggled to get a new rabbi appointed for an existing congregation. Seven synagogues continued to function (two in Tashkent, two in Samarkand, two in Bukhara, and one in Andijon), but each was struggling for financial support, and one Tashkent synagogue had to close its doors during the reporting period for financial reasons. The Jewish school in Tashkent's Yakkasaroy district provides instruction on Jewish culture.

Local officials and representatives of the religious establishment continued to express apprehension over the proselytizing activities of Jehovah's Witnesses. Foreign NGOs accused by the government of proselytizing remained closed, along with most other foreign NGOs. A 2003 Cabinet of Ministers decree restricts the activities of faith-based NGOs, and the 1998 religion law prohibits "actions aimed at converting believers of one religion into another (proselytizing) as well as any other missionary activity." The MOJ controls accreditation, a necessity for any foreigner attempting to work for an NGO in the country. This control allows the government to force out, without bringing formal charges, those it believes are proselytizing.

In February 2010 Forum 18, a Norwegian NGO that reports on religious freedom in post-Communist states, reported that a Russian Protestant was deported for missionary activities.

In November 2009 a British citizen who held a leadership role in the Baha'i community was deported. Although no official explanation was given, a \$10 (1,300 soums) fine that followed an allegedly unsanctioned meeting of Baha'i followers may have been the basis for the deportation. The individual had been living and working in the country since 1990 without interference from authorities.

In November 2009 a Danish businessman was deported, reportedly accused of proselytizing in connection with the Jehovah's Witnesses organization. His status as a Jehovah's Witness could not be confirmed.

In August 2009 a Kazakh citizen was deported following a 15-day sentence for resisting authorities during a July 24, 2009 police raid on the Tashkent Baha'i Center. He had been living legally in the country with his Uzbek wife and children since 2004. The media reported that he was deported for

actively promoting the ideas of the Baha'i religion.

Sources reported that the government instructed mahalla committees and imams to identify local residents who could potentially become involved in extremist activity or groups, including those who prayed daily or otherwise demonstrated active devotion. The government controlled the content of imams' sermons and the volume and content of published Islamic materials.

Observant Muslims appeared to be able to display their faith in public freely, but in the name of security, authorities gave increased attention to social gatherings where religious issues were discussed, particularly among men, with several arrests based on participation in such discussions. Sources reported that for this reason, Muslims were becoming more reluctant to discuss religion outside of the mosque with persons other than close family members. There also were reports of increased pressure on imams to discourage the wearing of hijabs.

There were several reports that children faced increasing difficulties in practicing their faith. Some schools sent parents questionnaires that include questions about whether their children attend church or mosque. Officials have been known then to discourage both Muslim and Christian parents from continuing this practice. Some school officials have questioned students about their religion and why they attend services. One activist reported a 13-year-old girl being sent home from school for wearing a hijab, and there were other reports of school officials rebuking girls for the same reason. There were reports that local officials pressured imams to prevent children from attending Friday prayers, and some children were known to have been sent home after trying to attend.

There were credible reports that the security services continued their covert surveillance of religious communities. Authorities raided several Christian and Baha'i gatherings of both registered and unregistered groups. In the case of raids against registered groups, authorities cited heretofore unknown restrictions on members' ability to meet outside of the area in which they were registered. Persons with cameras were observed filming participants in Friday prayer services at local mosques as well.

State-controlled media in some cases encouraged prejudice against certain minority religious groups. During the reporting period, state-controlled media accused missionaries of posing a danger to society. Government officials also held meetings at universities and schools in different regions warning students about the "negative consequences of missionaries and religious extremism."

In October 2009 a Tashkent cable television station aired a documentary reportedly produced by Uzbek National Television entitled, "Hypocrisy," which accused religious groups, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses and the Full Gospel Church, of seizing the hearts and minds of thousands of citizens. It averred that missionaries were trying to turn the nation into "zombies," in order to deprive it of its spiritual and national identity.

On September 17, 2009, a government-affiliated web site posted an article about the Baha'i, calling one member a "cult leader" and asserting that the Baha'i faith was being used to destabilize the Muslim community. The same article was published in two newspapers in the days that followed.

Also in September 2009, Uzbek state television aired a program called "Mask of Intrigue," discussing Nur and its members in Uzbekistan. The program stated that every citizen should be able to "respond to malicious powers that are trampling on our ancient, sacred values and trying to threaten our peaceful, quiet life."

Several other articles condemned missionary activity and accused missionaries of sowing civil discord.

Although the government requires that the CRA approve all religious literature, in practice a number

of other government entities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), National Security Service (NSS), Customs Service, and local police may suppress or confiscate religious literature. The religion law restricts the right to publish, import, and distribute religious literature solely to registered central offices of religious organizations, of which eight exist: the Bible Society of Uzbekistan (BSU); the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan; Tashkent Islamic University; Tashkent Islamic Institute; and Russian Orthodox, Full Gospel, Baptist, and Roman Catholic offices. The government may confiscate and in some cases destroy illegally imported religious literature.

During the reporting period, the government restricted the quantity of Christian literature in Uzbek that registered central religious organizations could import. The BSU shipment of approximately 11,000 religious books and brochures--to which the CRA refused to grant importation permission in May 2008, claiming that the BSU had not properly notified authorities about the shipment--remained impounded, as did a 2006 shipment of Jehovah's Witnesses literature. In January 2010 the BSU requested permission to import a shipment of 3,000 books of 59 different titles, all in Russian. The BSU also requested to publish locally one book of the Bible (the Book of Isaiah), in the Uzbek language. In response the CRA requested a list of churches and pastors who wanted the materials in question, with an explanation of why they wanted them and to whom they would be distributed. This was the first time such a request had been made. The BSU, concerned about the legality of the request and the implications for pastors and church members whose names might go on such lists, did not respond to the request, and at the end of the reporting period the dispute continued.

Authorities also confiscated, and in some cases destroyed, Christian literature in Uzbek and Russian that had been legally imported. For historical and cultural reasons, evangelical pastors generally preach in Russian while offering limited services in Uzbek, the official national language and the one linked most closely to the majority Muslim population. In previous reporting periods, the CRA allowed some materials, such as limited quantities of Uzbek translations of some books of the Bible, to be imported.

The International Post Office in Tashkent continued to scrutinize all incoming packages and send examples of any religious material to the CRA for further examination and approval. When the CRA bans the materials, it mails a letter to the intended recipient and the sender explaining the rejection. The CRA has denied entry for both Christian and Muslim titles.

The government tightly controlled access to Muslim publications and required a statement in every domestic publication (books, pamphlets, compact discs, and movies) indicating the source of its publication authority. Many books were published with the phrase "permission for this book was granted by the CRA" or "this book is recommended by the CRA," indicating official sanction. Generally, books published under the Muslim Board's imprint "Movarounnahr" contained these phrases, as did other religious works published under the imprint of the state-owned Sharq and Tashkent Islamic University Publishing Houses. A few imported works in Arabic were sometimes available from book dealers. More controversial literature was generally not available in the marketplace. Possession of literature by authors deemed to be extremists, or of any literature illegally imported or produced, may lead to arrest and prosecution. The government categorically prohibited HT leaflets and Nur literature.

The government limited the number of Hajj pilgrims to 5,080, or approximately 20 percent of the country's allowed number of pilgrims (estimated at approximately 25,000 pilgrims or approximately 1,000 pilgrims for every 1 million of population). The government intended to organize the Umra (small Hajj) pilgrimage two times during the reporting period, once in spring and once in fall, but authorities postponed the fall 2009 trip due to concerns over the H1N1 virus. In spring 2010, 3,081 persons participated. Local mahalla committees, district administrations, the National Security Service, and the state-run Hajj Commission, which is controlled by the CRA and the Muftiate, were all reportedly involved in vetting potential pilgrims, subject to a blacklist.

Government employees generally display less religious devotion than do citizens in the private sector. The state maintains a policy of secularism, and government employees are careful to maintain the separation between religion and state structures.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The government continued to commit serious abuses of religious freedom in its campaign against extremists or those participating in underground Islamic activity. In many cases authorities severely mistreated persons arrested on suspicion of extremism, using torture, beatings, and harsh prison conditions. Again during the reporting period, a significant number of individuals were imprisoned for Nur membership. Family members of prisoners convicted on charges related to religious extremism report that prisoners were often not allowed to read the Qur'an or pray privately. Most defendants convicted of extremism charges received sentences ranging from three to 14 years; a smaller number received sentences of 16 to 20 years.

In contrast with the past two reporting periods, there were reports that prisoners convicted of religion offenses were not allowed to associate with each other.

On July 15, 2010, Nigmat Zufarov was found dead in prison, officially due to suicide. Zufarov had conducted a six-day hunger strike in May 2009 demanding that he be allowed to pray in prison and reportedly was mistreated by guards following the incident. His family claimed there were signs of torture on his body. In response to an inquiry by UN special rapporteurs, the government denied that prisoners are punished for praying while imprisoned.

On June 17, 2010, Sunnatillo Zaripov died in prison, where he had been serving a 15-year term. Relatives reported to the press that he died as a result of torture, but the report could not be confirmed.

On June 28, 2009, Golib Mullajonov died in prison after reportedly being beaten by other inmates. Mullajonov had been serving a prison sentence for membership in HT.

There were no updates in the following cases of inmates convicted of religious extremism who died under unclear circumstances: the May 2008 case of Odil Azizov and the November 2007 cases of Fitrat Salakhiddinov and Takhir Nurmukhammedov, all of whose relatives reported finding signs of torture on the bodies.

There were several reports of beatings of prisoners serving sentences for religious convictions. In June and April 2010 family members of prisoners serving long sentences for charges related to extremism reported that other inmates had severely beaten their relatives in prison, at the instruction of a prison official.

In summer 2009 two high-profile murders, one murder attempt, and one shoot-out took place in Tashkent that were alleged by the government to have religious links (for example, one target was the chief imam for the city of Tashkent). In the months that followed, as many as 200 persons were arrested allegedly in connection with these incidents; many were charged with membership in extremist religious organizations and attempting to overturn the constitutional order. Between January and April 2010 various courts in closed trials convicted at least 50 persons and imposed sentences ranging from suspended sentences up to 18 years in prison. There were unconfirmed reports that an additional 150 individuals were convicted in related trials. During the same time period, authorities opened hundreds more cases against alleged extremists (particularly those labeled "Wahhabists" and "jihadists") on charges unrelated to the killings. Human rights activists report that the families of several defendants accused authorities of using torture and coercion to obtain confessions, and many questioned whether due process guarantees were followed.

NGOs reported that in 2009, 47 individuals were imprisoned for Nur membership, and at least 26 others were arrested. Since the beginning of 2010, police arrested at least 103 more persons for Nur membership. Suspected Nur members had been imprisoned before, but never in such numbers. Several human rights activists criticized the cases against alleged Nur members, citing due process concerns and insufficient proof to support convictions. Some of the cases involved allegations of torture and coercion.

Sentences for members of minority religious groups increased during the reporting period, with several persons sentenced to 15-day jail terms under the administrative code and others given heavy fines. Several sources reported that whereas in previous years typical fines were between two and 10 times the minimum wage, fines this time were often between 20 and 100 times the minimum wage.

On June 28, 2010, a Bukhara Regional Court sentenced seven men to six years and two others to eight years in prison on charges related to membership in Nur. Reportedly, a related trial of 10 additional suspects continued at the end of the reporting period.

On June 3, 2010, a Ferghana City court sentenced 17 men to five to eight years in prison for membership in Tablighi Jamaat, marking the first time such a large group was convicted for Tablighi Jamaat membership.

On May 31, 2010, a Ferghana regional court sentenced 10 people to between five and eight years in prison for membership in Nur and distribution of materials threatening the public order.

On May 28, 2010, eight women were arrested for distributing books promoting religious extremism in the Ferghana Valley. The state-run press reported that one of the defendants had engaged in making copies of books that "damage our spiritual heritage and promote an alien religion."

On May 27, 2010, a Tashkent court sentenced popular soccer and religious commentator Hayrulla Khamidov to six years in prison for being a "jihadist," and for illegal distribution of materials that threaten the public order. Three codefendants received the same sentence, two others were given four years, and 13 were released with suspended sentences or fines. Twenty others were convicted of similar sentences in three related trials, for a total of 39 convictions.

On May 16, 2010, officials raided the Tashkent City Church of Christ during its Sunday service, questioned congregants, and confiscated computers, CDs, DVDs, religious literature, and money from a collection box. One church leader and two employees were convicted of unauthorized teaching of religion and conducting illegal religious activity, while five other church members were convicted of lesser charges. Three of the defendants were sentenced to 15 days in jail; all were fined between \$50 and \$2,010 (between 65,600 and 2.6 million soums).

In May 2010 a Termez court sentenced Obidjon Toshpulatov, Chori Tagaev, and Shavkat Mengniyev to between four and eight years in prison for recruiting new members into Nur by distributing religious literature and organizing religious education, including a Nur "training center."

On March 12, 2010, the Syrdarya Regional Criminal Court sentenced 10 persons for membership in banned organizations and other crimes related to the Tashkent killings. There were unconfirmed reports of three related trials in Syrdarya involving 67 additional convictions.

On March 4, 2010, a Tashkent Regional Criminal Court sentenced 15 persons to between 15 and 18 years for membership in Islamic Jihad and involvement in the Tashkent murders. There were unconfirmed reports of an additional 83 convictions in three related trials.

On May 10, 2010, the Tashkent Regional Criminal Court sentenced eight men to unknown sentences for membership in banned religious organizations.

On April 27, 2010, the Tashkent Regional Criminal Court sentenced 25 men to between three and six years for membership in banned religious organizations.

On April 23, 2010, a Termez court sentenced Protestants Azamat Rajapov and Abdusattor Kurbonov to 15 days in jail for unauthorized religious activity. Family members reportedly were not informed where their relatives were tried or held in custody. Following their release, the men reported close surveillance by law enforcement.

On April 15, 2010, the Jizzakh regional criminal court sentenced 25 men to between two and 10 years in prison (with one suspended sentence) for membership in banned religious organizations. Although this case was initially believed to be connected with the Tashkent killings, the verdict did not include any reference to those events.

On April 12, 2010, a Kashkadarya Regional court sentenced Mehrinisso Hamdamova to seven years in a labor camp for attempting to overturn the constitutional order and distribution of materials threatening public order. Hamdamova was a teacher of Muslim women, officially appointed by the Spiritual Board of Uzbekistan to work at the Kuk Gumbas Islamic complex in Karshi. Hamdamova's sister and another relative who attended meetings with them, Zulkhumor Hamdamova and Shakhlo Rakhmatova, were sentenced to six and a half years in a labor camp on similar charges.

In April 2010 a court sentenced Muhammad Ayubkhon Homidov, former rector at Tashkent Islamic Institute, to three years in prison for membership in Nur, but suspended the sentence because of his medical condition.

In April 2010 an Andijon court sentenced Muhammadjon Yusupov to seven years in prison for keeping 10 illegal religious books in his home.

In October 2009 a Tashkent court convicted the chairman of the Evangelical Baptist Union, its accountant, and a camp director on criminal charges related to the operation of a summer camp for children. Despite the fact that the camp required parents to sign a contract with the camp that detailed the mission and activities of the camp, the three members were convicted of involving children in religious activity without their parents' consent, along with tax-related charges concerning the financial operations of the camp. The court fined them each \$5,800 (7.6 million soums) and forbade them from participating in any administrative or commercial activity for three years. As a result, all three had to step down from their positions. In December 2009 the Tashkent City Criminal Court granted amnesty for the fines, but left in place the requirement to pay unpaid taxes and the three-year bans on economic activity. The camp had been operating in the same place since 2002.

The NGO Forum 18 reported that on January 20, 2010, police arrested 40 alleged members of Nur in Bukhara. Around the same time, police arrested 25 military personnel, also for membership in Nur. Twelve of the 25 reportedly faced courts martial, but there was no information regarding the outcome of those procedures.

On January 18, 2010, a Kashkadarya court sentenced human rights activist Gaybullo Jalilov and three others to nine years in prison for membership in an extremist religious group that allegedly planned terrorist attacks against a regional airport. A known human rights activist, Jalilov had been active in assisting others accused of extremism and their families. Jalilov claimed he was mistreated in custody and coerced into signing a confession. His conviction was upheld on appeal.

On August 23, 2009, officials raided the worship service at the registered Donam Protestant Church in Tashkent, confiscating literature and videos and detaining several persons for questioning. Four men were sentenced to 15-day prison terms for conducting unauthorized meetings, and the

confiscated items were destroyed.

In August 2009 the Supreme Court of Karakalpakstan sentenced five men to between 12 and 15 years in prison on charges of religious extremism. The organization to which they were accused of belonging was not reported.

On August 5, 2009, a Jizzakh regional court sentenced Rustam Kuvandikov to seven years in prison for undermining the constitutional order, participating in a religious extremist organization (Nur), and distributing illegal religious materials.

In July 2009 courts in Samarkand and Khorezm sentenced 21 men to between five and 11 years in prison for membership in Nur.

On July 24, 2009, officials raided the officially registered Tashkent Baha'i Center, searched the facility, and took six adults and 15 youth between the ages of 14 and 17 into custody for questioning. Two of the adults were arrested and detained for 15 days on charges of resisting authorities. Four others were charged with organizing an unsanctioned meeting and fined \$10 (1,300 soums). Although all of those present were members of various registered Baha'i groups, authorities told them it was illegal for members of different congregations to meet without separate permission or registration. On August 26, 2009, officials again entered the center unannounced, demanding to see customs declarations for all books.

At the end of the reporting period, there was no information on the whereabouts of four individuals suspected of Nur membership, including Muhammadjon Sobirov, and arrested in Namangan or of 12 suspected Nur members were arrested in Khorezm Province.

On December 22, 2008, law enforcement officials in Bukhara raided the home of Ikrom Merajov, a university lecturer, and confiscated religious literature. Merajov and eight other men – Muzaffar Allayorov, Botir Tukhtamurodov, Alisher Jumaev, Abdurahmon Musaev, Bobomurod Sanoev, Jamshid Ramazonov, Salohiddin Kosimov, and Shuhrat Karimov – were charged with membership in Nur and were in pretrial detention in Bukhara at the end of the reporting period. A few days after the raid, another unidentified man was reportedly arrested in Bukhara on the same charges. Merajov's arrest was reported in the February 2009 documentary that aired on state-controlled television.

There were limited reports of cases of arrest or detention based on alleged membership in the religious extremist organization HT, and the HT label was no longer extensively used as a pretext to arrest and imprison for other reasons. In an April 2009 report, the Moscow-based Memorial human rights group released a list of 1,452 individuals prosecuted by officials on allegedly politically motivated charges between 2004 and 2008. Nearly 95 percent of them were charged with religious extremism, many for alleged HT membership. The report cited 38 trials involving multiple religious extremism suspects in 2004, 54 in 2005, 43 in 2006, 18 in 2007, and 10 in 2008. It was impossible to verify the number of prisoners in detention for alleged HT membership; estimates from previous reporting periods were as high as 4,500.

There were continued reports that shortly before their release, prisoners convicted of religious extremism were retried for organizing extremist cells within prison or other offenses and had their prison terms extended. Similarly, prisoners who would otherwise be eligible to apply for amnesty often were charged with internal prison violations, rendering them ineligible to apply.

In July 2009 a local human rights organization published a list of 12 persons who were within one to two months of scheduled release from prison when they were charged and convicted of disobedience in prison. Sentences were extended for between 2.5 and 3.5 years.

Two Jehovah's Witnesses in prison for violations of religion laws requested amnesty under the September 2009 Amnesty Decree. Olim Turayev and Abdubannob Akmedov, both in the middle of four-year sentences that started in 2008, were charged and convicted for violating prison regulations, thus making them ineligible for amnesty.

While prisons had special areas set aside for inmates to pray and prison libraries had copies of the Qur'an and the Bible, there were reports that prison authorities did not allow some prisoners suspected of Islamic extremism to practice their religion freely, not permitting inmates to pray five times a day or refusing to adjust work and meal schedules for the Ramadan fast. There were also reports that prisoners were punished for "violating internal prison regulations" by praying at certain times of the day.

During the reporting period, only a small number of convictions for HT membership were reported, as the government turned its attention to other groups. Several of the people convicted in secret trials following the Tashkent killings were accused of being "Wahhabists," but the exact number convicted with this label was unknown. In the previous reporting period, at least 11 other persons were imprisoned for being "Wahhabists" or extremists from other religious extremist organizations.

The government continued to pursue the extradition of suspected Uzbek religious extremists from third countries, particularly from Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Ukraine, including those who had sought asylum. During the previous reporting period, at least two individuals seeking political asylum in Kyrgyzstan were forcibly extradited to Uzbekistan and imprisoned on religious extremism charges.

There were no updates in the following cases of individuals convicted of membership in HT and other extremist organizations during the previous reporting period: the June 2008 sentencing of two women--Ugilo Mirzaeva and Rano Akhrorkhodzhayeva--to five years' imprisonment for HT membership, recruitment, and dissemination of extremist literature; the February 2008 sentencing of 13 individuals to between 16 and 20 years in prison on charges of membership in a religious extremist organization, with allegations that at least one confession was obtained under duress; the January 2008 sentencing of Alisher Ubaydullayev to five years' imprisonment for membership in an extremist organization, based on accusations of spreading Wahhabi ideas and on his participation in an antigovernment rally outside the Uzbek embassy in London in 2005; the December 2007 conviction of three men of membership in Tablighi Jamaat and sentencing of each to between 11 and 14 years in prison; the October 2007 sentencing of eight men, who were tortured during pretrial investigation according to human rights activists, to between three and 10 years' imprisonment for membership in HT; and the July 2007 sentencing of Dilnoza Tokhtakhodjaeva to three years' imprisonment and six other women to two-year suspended sentences for membership in HT after reportedly being subjected to psychological pressure and threats.

Unlike in previous reporting periods, there were no credible reports of arrests or harassment of Muslim believers based solely on outward expressions of their religious belief such as beards, veils, or mosque attendance, or of authorities citing religious extremism as a pretext for prosecuting those of moderate religious belief who were not members of banned organizations.

Pastor Dmitry Shestakov, leader of a registered Full Gospel Pentecostal congregation, remained in a Navoi labor camp serving a four-year sentence for his 2007 convictions on charges of organizing an illegal religious group, inciting religious hatred, and distributing extremist religious literature.

On March 9, 2010, a court in the Syrdarya region sentenced Tohar Haydarov to 10 years' imprisonment on questionable drug-related charges. Haydarov was a member of the Baptist Council of Churches but not part of a registered congregation. Friends who saw Haydarov briefly outside of the courtroom following his trial reported his face was swollen from apparent beatings. An appellate court rejected Haydarov's initial appeal of the conviction; he intended to appeal to the Supreme Court.

Any religious service conducted by an unregistered religious organization is illegal. There were numerous reported instances of police raiding meetings of unregistered congregations and detaining their members. With a few exceptions, authorities charged those detained with unauthorized religious activity such as worshipping, teaching, proselytizing, or possessing unauthorized religious material, and imposed administrative fines of 50 to 100 times the minimum wage. In contrast with previous periods, several individuals were imprisoned for up to 15 days for such offenses during the reporting period.

Forum 18 reported that on June 23, 2010, officers raided a youth meeting held by an unregistered Pentecostal congregation in Chirchik. Police reportedly confiscated four Bibles and a computer.

In April 2010 officials raided two programs organized by Tashkent-based Protestant churches. At the first, police entered a youth conference, confiscated materials, and brought 43 youths to a police station for fingerprinting and photographing. At the second, police stopped church members feeding homeless people, complaining that such activity was not in their charter.

Also in April 2010 officials raided a private home in Tashkent where 10 Pentecostal women were celebrating a birthday, and imposed heavy fines --\$2,460 (3.2 million soums)-- on all 10 for holding unsanctioned meetings. The verdict and fines were upheld on appeal.

On March 30, 2010, the day on which Jehovah's Witnesses commemorated the death of Jesus Christ, officials searched 11 houses belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses in Kagan, where there is no registered Jehovah's Witnesses congregation. Finding five persons in one home, authorities demanded written statements, and in the days that followed reportedly beat two of the witnesses, demanding statements about what occurred during the memorial service. On April 5, 2010, the Kagan City Criminal Court found four of the participants guilty of administrative charges, fining two of them \$1,200 (1.6 million soums) and two of them \$200 (263,000 soums).

On February 23, 2010, a court convicted 13 members of an unregistered Baptist church located in Almalyk of the unauthorized teaching of religion and fined them each \$2,500 (3.2 million soums), following a police raid on a private home. Police confiscated religious literature, including Bibles. In a protest letter to the court, the defendants alleged more than 60 violations of the law during the arrest and investigation against them, including that police beat several of the defendants at the time of arrest.

On January 3, 2010, officials interrupted the Christmas celebration of the registered Holiness Full Gospel Protestant Church that was being held in a private home in Tashkent's Yangiyul District. Officials reasoned that although registered in the district, the congregation was not registered in Umid village, where the celebration took place.

On January 2, 2010, officials raided the private home of a member of the unregistered Greater Grace Protestant Church in Samarkand and broke up a gathering of eight youths, ages 13 to 21. They confiscated religious literature and CDs, as well as a laptop and iPod, and brought all eight to the local detention center for questioning. Authorities fined one of the youths \$192 (252,000 soums) and two other church members \$123 (162,000 soums) for teaching religion illegally. An appellate court upheld the verdict. Authorities did not return the confiscated materials.

In October 2009 police entered a private home, detaining several persons and confiscating religious literature and videos. An Urgench court fined 17 Protestants between \$44 and \$370 (58,000 and 486,000 soums) for possessing religious literature and ordered the confiscated materials destroyed.

In October 2009 police entered a private home, interrupting a group of Protestants gathered for a meal. On October 23, a Surhandarya court fined 11 persons between \$220 and \$1,100 (289,000 and 1.4 million soums) for the unauthorized teaching of religion and for holding an unauthorized

religious meeting.

Forum 18 reported 13 instances during the reporting period where authorities imposed fines for Christian activities. Those fined included members of the Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Full Gospel, and other Protestant groups. Fines ranged from \$75 (99,000 soums) for possession of unauthorized religious literature to more than \$1,800 (2.4 million soums) for holding unauthorized meetings and the unauthorized teaching of religion. These incidents included one report of police banning a disabled person from attending the unregistered Baptist Church where he was a member, and later confiscating his Christian books and audio tapes and fining him \$75 (99,000 soums) for their possession.

According to Forum 18, officials in Karakalpakstan reportedly ordered several Protestants not to associate with other Christians or have any Christian literature in their homes.

There were several reports from the Muslim and minority religious communities that authorities pressured employers to fire or not to hire members of religious minorities and family members of religious prisoners.

Some minority religious leaders report being stopped by border guards, questioned, and delayed whenever attempting to leave the country.

There were reports that officials have threatened lawyers who represent defendants accused of charges related to religion that they are at risk of losing their licenses.

There were no cases during the reporting period in which authorities deported members of religious minority groups from the country on the basis of their religious affiliation alone.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The government continued to improve its implementation of habeas corpus laws instituted in the previous reporting period, which was expected to reduce the likelihood of torture during the arrest and pretrial detention period by transferring authority to issue arrest warrants from prosecutors to the courts, thereby subjecting law enforcement officials to judicial oversight.

The government continued to respect the military pacifism of Jehovah's Witnesses, as the draft board routinely allowed members to perform alternate service. On March 30, 2010, the registered Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Chirchik did not encounter any disruptions during its annual memorial services commemorating Jesus Christ's death. In November 2009 a Jehovah's Witness in Andijon convicted for teaching religion illegally was granted amnesty in the courtroom.

Authorities granted visas to Jehovah's Witnesses representatives from the United States to visit the country in June.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Society was generally tolerant of religious diversity but not of proselytizing. In particular, Muslim, Russian Orthodox, Catholic, and Jewish leaders reported high levels of acceptance in society. However, some evangelical or Pentecostal Christian churches and churches with ethnic Uzbek converts encountered difficulties stemming from discrimination. There were persistent reports that ethnic Uzbeks who converted to Christianity faced discrimination and harassment. State-controlled

media in some cases encouraged societal prejudice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. ambassador and other embassy officials met with local religious leaders, human rights activists, and government officials to discuss specific issues of human rights and religious freedom. U.S. State Department officials in Washington, D.C., met on several occasions with embassy officials of the country to convey U.S. interest in expanding religious freedom. U.S. officials traveled to and around the country meeting with religious groups and government officials. The ambassador and other embassy officials maintained regular contact with the CRA and with religious leaders, including imams, priests, and rabbis; they also regularly discussed religious freedom concerns with educators, journalists, and human rights activists. The embassy emphasized the importance of religious freedom by including religious leaders in its official events.

When the embassy learned of difficulties religious groups or faith-based foreign aid organizations faced, it intervened on their behalf where possible, taking such actions as contacting government officials and attending trials. Embassy officials frequently discussed religious freedom cases with diplomatic colleagues to coordinate efforts on monitoring cases and contacting government officials.

U.S. officials urged the government to allow more freedom of religious expression, more mosque registrations, and more amnesties of religious prisoners of conscience, consistently emphasizing that religious tolerance and political security are complementary goals. Senior U.S. officials, both in Washington, D.C., and in Tashkent, pursued negotiations with the government aimed at amending its laws on religion, including lowering the 100-member minimum required to form a religious group, repealing the ban on proselytizing, lifting restrictions on the importation and publication of religious literature, and eliminating legal provisions prohibiting the private teaching of religion.

In 2006 the secretary of state first designated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On January 16, 2009, the secretary renewed the CPC designation.

Topics: Sunni, Sunni, Shiite, Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal, Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Lutheran, Jew, Jehovah's Witness, Hare Krishna, Evangelical, Christian, Catholic, Baptist, Baha'i, Freedom of religion, Religious minorities,