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Executive Summary

The Basic Law of the Macau Special Administrative Region (Macau SAR) and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Officers from the consulate general in Hong Kong occasionally met with leaders of religious groups and spiritual organizations in the region, as well as with academics from the Catholic Church-affiliated University of Saint Joseph.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to the Government Statistics and Census Service, the population is 568,700. The Government Information Bureau reports that nearly 80 percent of the population practices Buddhism. There are approximately 30,000 Roman Catholics (of whom over half are foreign domestic workers and expatriates residing in Macau) and more than 8,000 Protestants. Smaller religious groups include Bahais (estimated at 2,500 persons); Muslims (estimated at 400 persons); and a small number of Falun Gong practitioners (estimated at 50 persons).

There are approximately 40 Buddhist temples, as well as dozens of village temples and houses dedicated to Buddhist deities; 30 Taoist temples; three Catholic cathedrals, 18 Catholic churches and 56 Catholic chapels within diocesan buildings; approximately 70 Protestant churches; four Bahai centers; and one mosque.

Protestant denominations include Baptist, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Pentecostal churches. There are also evangelical groups and independent local churches.

An estimated 70 Protestant churches with 4,000 members conduct services in Chinese; approximately 4,000 worshippers attend every Sunday. An estimated 500 Protestants attend services conducted in foreign languages.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Basic Law and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

Article 34 of the Basic Law states, "Macau residents shall have freedom of religious belief, and freedom to preach and to conduct and participate in religious activities in public." Article 128 of the Basic Law stipulates, "the government, consistent with the principle of religious freedom, shall not interfere in the internal affairs of religious groups or in the efforts of religious groups and their believers to maintain and develop relations with their counterparts outside Macau or restrict religious activities which do not contravene the laws of the Special Administrative Region."

Under the Basic Law, the government of the Macau SAR, rather than the central government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), safeguards religious freedom in the SAR. Religious groups coordinate their relations with co-religionists in the PRC through the Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO). Religious groups report that the CGLO supports these activities and exchanges. The CGLO also maintains dialogue with religious groups in the SAR.

The 1998 Freedom of Religion and Worship Law (Freedom of Religion Law), which remained in effect after Macau's 1999 transfer of sovereignty to the PRC, provides for freedom of religion, including privacy of religious belief, freedom of religious assembly, freedom to hold religious processions, and freedom of religious education.

The Freedom of Religion Law allows religious groups to register directly with the Identification Bureau, which is required under the law to receive and process registrations. Applicants must supply name, identification card number, contact information, group name, and a copy of the group's charter to register. Religious groups can apply to media organizations and companies to use mass media (television, radio, etc.) to preach, and such applications generally are approved. Registration is not required to conduct religious activities, and it does not automatically confer tax-exempt status or other advantages.

The Freedom of Religion Law also stipulates that religious groups may develop and maintain relations with religious groups abroad. The Catholic Church, which is in communion with the Vatican, recognizes the Pope as the head of the church. The Vatican appoints the bishop for the diocese.

The Macau government provides financial support for the establishment of schools, childcare centers, clinics, homes for the elderly, rehabilitation centers, and vocational training centers run by religious groups. The Macau Inter-University Institute (later renamed the University of Saint Joseph), which is affiliated with the Catholic University of Portugal, offers a Christian studies course that includes Catholic seminary students from the Mainland.

The government observes Christmas, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and Buddha's Birthday as public holidays.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Relations among the various religious groups were good, and citizens generally were tolerant of the religious views and practices of others. Many religious groups, including Catholics, Buddhists, Protestants, and Bahais, provided extensive social services. Falun Gong members regularly set up informational sites in public venues.

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

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Officers from the consulate general in Hong Kong occasionally met with leaders of religious groups and spiritual organizations in the region, as well as with academics from the University of Saint Joseph to discuss religious freedom.