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BURMA 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees every citizen “the right to freely profess and practice religion subject to public order, morality, or health and to the other provisions of this Constitution.” The law prohibits speech or acts insulting or defaming any religion or religious beliefs. As during previous years, it was sometimes difficult to categorize incidents as based solely on religious identity due to the close linkage between religion and ethnicity. Violence, discrimination, and harassment in Rakhine State targeting ethnic Rohingya, nearly all Muslim, and other minority populations continued. Following the military’s commission of ethnic cleansing and other mass atrocities against Rohingya in August 2017 that displaced more than 700,000 refugees to Bangladesh, Rohingya remaining in Burma continued to face an environment of severe repression and restrictions on freedom of movement and access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods based on their ethnicity, religion, and citizenship status, according to the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Among the 163 Rohingya who reportedly fled the country between January and October, some cited ongoing abuses in Rakhine State; others reported continuing government pressure to participate in a residency verification campaign, which they said they did not trust. During the year, several UN entities commented or released reports on the Rohingya crisis. In September, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar said the government was purposefully evading accountability and making it difficult for Rohingya refugees to safely return to Rakhine State as part of the government’s goal of “exterminating their basic identity.” The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) began to interview witnesses and collect evidence for possible criminal proceedings for gross violations of human rights, including against Rohingya. Religious leaders and civil society activists reported some government and military officials continued to deploy anti-Rohingya and anti-Muslim rumors and hate speech in official events. Rohingya, both in Rakhine State and those living in Bangladesh, faced mass disenfranchisement in November general elections because of discriminatory citizenship policies. The government barred seven Rohingya politicians from running in the elections on citizenship grounds, while allowing five Muslim candidates from the Kaman minority to run. Non-Buddhist minority groups, including Christians, Hindus, and Muslims, said authorities restricted religious practice, denied freedom of movement to members of religious minority groups, closed places of worship, denied or failed to approve permits for religious buildings and repairs, and discriminated in employment and housing. NGOs said

the military's selective denial of humanitarian access in some conflict areas, including Kachin, Chin, and Rakhine States, led to continued severe hardship for religious minority groups.

According to media reports, ethnic armed organizations in the country continued to pose a threat to religious freedom. Christian pastor Tun Nu, abducted in 2019 by the Arakan Army and previously presumed dead, was found alive and was reunited with his family in March. In the Wa Self-Administered Division, where the government had no administrative control, the United Wa State Army (UWSA) tightened restrictions on Christian religious practice. In December 2019, 51 Baptist churches had reopened and UWSA authorities stated they were conducting assessments to determine which other churches would be allowed to reopen. In October, however, a Baptist religious leader reported that all churches were again closed and even house worship was limited to no more than four families together in some areas.

Some leaders and members of the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation (formerly Ma Ba Tha) continued to issue pejorative statements against Muslims. Although the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (SSMNC), an independent but government-supported body that oversees Buddhist affairs, issued orders that no group or individual be allowed to operate under the banner of Ma Ba Tha and declared it an "illegal organization," many local Ma Ba Tha branches continued to operate with that name. Other Ma Ba Tha leaders continued propagating anti-Muslim speech in sermons and through social media. According to Burma Monitor, an NGO focused on monitoring and analyzing hate speech, more than 100 Ma Ba Tha-affiliated candidates registered to run in the 2020 general elections, mostly from nationalist parties such as the Democratic Party of National Politics, the military-linked National Development Party, and the People's Pioneer Party. While local and international experts said deep-seated prejudices led to abuses and discrimination against members of religious minority groups, some civil society groups worked to improve interreligious tolerance. According to media reports, civil society activists spearheaded efforts to improve interreligious tolerance and respect for religious practices and to deepen interfaith dialogue. The interfaith "White Rose" campaign that formed after an anti-Muslim, Buddhist nationalist mob shut down temporary Ramadan prayer sites in Yangon in 2019 continued its efforts. Other religious and civil society leaders continued to organize intrafaith and interfaith events and developed mechanisms to monitor and counter hate speech.

Senior U.S. government officials, including the Secretary of State, the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Ambassador to Burma, and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, advocated for religious freedom and tolerance and consistently raised concerns about discrimination against members of religious minority groups, the treatment of Rohingya and conditions in Rakhine State, and the prevalence of anti-Muslim hate speech and religious tensions. In June, the Acting USAID Administrator noted freedom of religion was a key component of national security and that the U.S. response to promote accountability for those involved in the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya remained a top priority. U.S. financial sanctions imposed in December 2019 on the Burmese military commander-in-chief, his deputy, and two brigadier generals for human rights violations against members of ethnic and religious minority groups remained in place. During the year, U.S. embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, frequently met with Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu leaders, including ethnic minority religious leaders, to highlight concerns about religion-based abuses, including discrimination, and called for respect for religious freedom and the values of diversity and tolerance in statements and other public messaging.

Since 1999, Burma has been designated a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On December 2, 2020, the Secretary of State redesignated Burma as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(a) pursuant to section 402(c) (5) of the Act.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 56.6 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the most recently available estimates, approximately 88 percent are Theravada Buddhists. Approximately six percent are Christians (primarily Baptists, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans, along with several small Protestant denominations). Muslims (mostly Sunni) comprise approximately four percent of the population. The 2014 census excluded Rohingya from its count, but NGOs and the government estimated the overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim Rohingya population at 1.1 million prior to October 2016. According to estimates from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other organizations, more than 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh beginning in August 2017, and an estimated 520,000 to 600,000 remain in Rakhine State. There are an estimated 130,000 Rohingya

living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, according to Human Rights Watch. There are small communities of Hindus and practitioners of traditional Chinese and indigenous religions. There is a very small Jewish community in Yangon (Rangoon).

There is a significant correlation between ethnicity and religion. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion among the majority Bamar ethnic group and among the Shan, Rakhine, Mon, and numerous other ethnic groups. Various forms of Christianity are dominant among the Kachin, Chin, and Naga ethnic groups. Christianity also is practiced widely among the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups, although many Karen and Karenni are Buddhist and some Karen are Muslim. Individuals of South Asian ancestry, who are concentrated in major cities and in the south-central region, are predominantly Hindu or Muslim, although some are Christian. Ethnic Rohingya and Kaman in Rakhine State, as well as some Bamar and ethnic Indians in Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Magway, and Mandalay Regions, practice Islam. Chinese ethnic minority groups generally practice traditional Chinese religions and to a lesser extent Islam and Christianity. Some smaller ethnic groups in the highland regions observe traditional indigenous beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states that every citizen is equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practice his or her religious beliefs. The constitution limits those rights if they threaten public order, health, morality, or other provisions of the constitution. It further provides to every citizen the right to profess and practice his or her religion if not contrary to laws on security, law and order, community peace, or public order and morality.

The law prohibits deliberate and malicious speech or acts intended to outrage or wound the religious feelings “of any class” by insulting or defaming its religion or religious beliefs. The law also prohibits injuring, defiling, or trespassing on any place of worship or burial grounds with the intent to insult religion.

All organizations, whether secular or religious, must register with the government to obtain official status. This official status is required for organizations to gain title to land, obtain construction permits, and conduct religious activities. The law on registering organizations specifies voluntary registration for local NGOs.

The law bars members of “religious orders” such as priests, monks, and nuns of any religious group, from running for public office, and the constitution bars members of religious orders from voting. The government restricts by law the political activities and expression of the Buddhist clergy (*sangha*). The constitution forbids “the abuse of religion for political purposes.” The election law states that a candidate’s parents must be citizens at the time of the candidate’s birth, and the citizenship of most Rohingya is denied, thus precluding Rohingya from candidate status.

Although there is no official state religion, the constitution notes that the government “recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Union.” The constitution “also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Animism as the religions existing in the Union at the day of the coming into operation of this Constitution.”

The government bans any organization of Buddhist monks other than the nine state-recognized monastic orders. Violations of this ban are punishable by immediate public defrocking and criminal penalties. The nine recognized orders submit to the authority of the SSMNC, the members of which are elected by monks.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs Department for the Perpetuation and Propagation of the Sasana (Buddhist teaching) oversees the government’s relations with Buddhist monks and schools. Religious education is not included in public schools; however, some schools with Buddhist-majority student bodies may start the school day with a Buddhist prayer.

Four laws passed in 2015 for the “protection of race and religion” remain in effect. The Buddhist Women Special Marriage law stipulates notification and registration requirements for marriages between non-Buddhist men and Buddhist women, obligations that non-Buddhist husbands must observe, and penalties for noncompliance. The Religious Conversion law regulates conversion through an extensive application and approval process through a township-level Religious Board for Religious Conversion; however, the law is rarely applied, and many townships do not have conversion boards. The applicant must be older than 18 and must undergo a waiting period of up to 180 days; if the applicant still wishes to convert, the board issues a certificate of religious conversion. The Population Control Law allows for the designation of special zones where population control measures may be applied, including authorizing local authorities to implement

three-year birth spacing. The Monogamy Law bans polygamous practices, which the country's penal code also criminalizes.

The country is not a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

International organizations and NGOs reported most members of the military involved in mass atrocities against Rohingya Muslims in 2017 had not been held accountable, and the military continued to commit acts of violence against members of ethnoreligious groups. In April, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Yanghee Lee stated that the military “may once again be committing crimes against humanity in Rakhine State.” According to Lee, the military had expanded its campaign against minorities from Rakhine to Chin States, adding, “having faced no accountability, the Tatmadaw continues to operate with impunity.” According to NGO Fortify Rights, two former soldiers confessed in videos recorded in July by the Arakan Army to having taken part in atrocities committed by the army against Rohingya in 2017. In the recording, the soldiers said they were involved in killing more than 180 Rohingya men, women, and children in Taung Buzar Village and surrounding villages in Buthidaung and five villages in Maungdaw during military operations in Rakhine State in late 2017. One also admitted to committing rape in Taung Buzar Village, Rakhine State. At year's end, the two men were reportedly in the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

On June 23, a Buddhist monk and military veteran stabbed to death a Muslim teenager in Magway Region's Aung Lan Township. The victim's brother told authorities the assailant, Tun Naing Win, called the brothers “*kalar*,” considered a derogatory term for persons of South Asian descent, and shouted, “You kalars do not own this country, you kalars do not own this road,” before killing the victim.

The investigation of the June 2, 2019, beating of one group of villagers by another group of villagers in Ann Myawik Village, Rakhine State continued with no reported progress through year's end. According to the CHRO, which first documented the incident in December 2019, 25 villagers, led by Khin Aung, Myint Maung, Hwe Hla and Nyuat Maung, assaulted members of the Chawn family, who were conducting a Christian home prayer service.

In November 2019, The Gambia filed an application instituting proceedings against Burma at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and a request for

provisional measures, alleging Burma's actions against Rohingya violated the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In January, the ICJ unanimously indicated provisional measures, ordering Burma to preserve any evidence of atrocities against Rohingya; ensure that government and security officials refrain from any act that could contribute to genocide; and report to the ICJ on its progress on these measures in May and every six months thereafter while the case was pending. The government submitted two reports and stated its reports would show decisively that no genocide occurred. The government also filed preliminary objections to the jurisdiction of the court and the admissibility of The Gambia's application; proceedings on the merits were suspended while the ICJ considered the preliminary objections. In September, Canada and the Netherlands announced their intention to intervene in the case.

According to the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor, during the year it was in the process of organizing a fact-finding mission to gather relevant evidence for its investigation into credible allegations that crimes against humanity were committed against Rohingya in Burma. Although the country is not a party to the ICC, the court claimed it had jurisdiction over such crimes if elements of the crime were at least commissioned in Bangladesh, which is a state party, and where most displaced Rohingya fled.

The Independent Commission of Enquiry established by the government in 2018 to investigate the 2017 violence in Rakhine State released the executive summary of its final report in January. The summary stated the commission found no evidence of genocidal intent, but it did not address alleged crimes against humanity. It stated the abuses amounted to "war crimes." According to Human Rights Watch, the executive summary was part of the government's attempt to portray the operation as a "legitimate armed conflict" with no element of genocide. The summary also stated there was "no evidence of gang rape committed by Burma's security forces," despite extensive documentation by the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar and human rights groups of widespread rape against Rohingya women and girls. According to Human Rights Watch, the executive summary of the final report fell well short of creating the conditions for justice and accountability or the safe return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh. As of the end of the year, the government had not released the full report. According to international and domestic human rights activists, previous government-led investigations of reports of widespread abuses by security services against Rohingya in northern Rakhine State in 2016 had yielded no findings of responsibility by security forces and were criticized by international observers as deeply flawed.

The IIMM, established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2018 to facilitate fair and independent criminal proceedings covering human rights abuses in Burma since 2011, continued to develop protocols and procedures to balance public outreach with confidentiality and the protection of witnesses in criminal cases. Since 2018, the government has denied the IIMM permission to establish an office in the country, and during the year, the IIMM, based in Geneva, received no response to its request to travel to the country. During the year, the IIMM received evidence from the UN Fact-Finding Mission, traveled to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh to interview Rohingya refugees, and completed a mapping of NGOs and victims' groups in Burma as part of planning for evidence collection there.

According to leaders of religious minority communities and human rights activists, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, communal disparities were exacerbated by inconsistent government regulations, their enforcement, and varying interpretations of the regulations around the country, with harsher outcomes for minority religious communities. The President's Office banned public events and mass gatherings nationwide on March 13, including religious events. As of year's end, a range of restrictions at the national and regional level remained in place, and pagodas, monasteries, mosques, and churches remained closed to the public. At least three different laws were applied to enforce limits on gatherings, including religious gatherings. The same action – for instance, a gathering of five or more persons – had the potential to result in charges and punishment under the Natural Disaster Management Law (three months to three years' imprisonment or a fine or both), the Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases Law (six months' imprisonment or a fine), or Article 188 of the Penal Code (one to six months' imprisonment or a fine). According to media, the government prosecuted Rohingya returnees from Bangladesh – returning through both formal and informal channels – amid anti-Muslim sentiment and hate speech from the public, military, and religious hardliners portraying Rohingya as a vector for the coronavirus.

More than 200 residents of Sinthay Village in Dawei District's Yebyu Township attended Buddhist funeral rites for a monk in April, despite COVID-19 restrictions. According to the *Irrawaddy* newspaper, the chairman and secretary of the pagoda trustee committee were fined 93,000 kyat (\$70) under the penal code for defying an order issued by government officials. In contrast, 12 Muslim men in Mandalay were sentenced to three months' imprisonment under the Natural Disaster Management Law for holding a religious gathering at a house in the Aung Pin Lae quarter of Chanmyathazi Township.

According to the *Myanmar Times*, Christian pastor David Lah and colleague Wai Tun were sentenced to three months in prison on August 6 for organizing a prayer session in April in violation of the government's National Disaster Management Law prohibiting mass gathering as part of a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In response, Ma Ba Tha members shared some of Lah's speeches denigrating Buddhism, reportedly in an attempt to incite anti-Christian hatred.

According to Monywa Aung Shin, secretary of the National League of Democracy's (NLD) central information unit, on May 26, Yangon Chief Minister Phyo Min Thein and the NLD-led Yangon regional government attended a public religious ceremony that went "against the government's own [COVID-19] instructions." The government took no disciplinary against the Chief Minister or cabinet members who attended the event.

Several NGOs reported authorities confined approximately 130,000 Rohingya in camps within the country, following an earlier round of violence in 2012. Restrictions on in-country movement of Rohingya remained extensive. Authorities required the largely stateless Rohingya to carry special documents and travel permits for internal movement in areas in Rakhine State, where most Rohingya reside.

In July, newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar Thomas Andrews told the Human Rights Council, "Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya are forced to live in deplorable conditions in IDP camps or in villages without basic rights, including freedom of movement." He also noted that a proposed camp closure project the government launched as part of its National Strategy on Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons and Closure of IDP Camps in 2019 "not only prohibits the right of IDPs to return home but may force them into land susceptible to flooding and without access to basic services, including healthcare and education. And it may also continue to deny other basic rights, including freedom of movement." According to local sources, authorities continued to deny IDPs the right to choose their relocation or return destination. Human Rights Watch described these IDP camps as severely limiting livelihoods, movement, education, health care, and adequate food and shelter. It stated the government closure process entailed constructing permanent structures near the current camp locations, further entrenching segregation and denying Rohingya the right to return to their land, reconstruct their homes, regain work, and reintegrate into society.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, an additional 163 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh between January and October, compared with 2,966 during the same period in 2019. According to humanitarian aid organizations, the government made no new efforts to initiate the return of Rohingya refugees during the year. An attempt in August 2019 failed when Rohingya refused to return, often saying they would be subject to human rights abuses if they returned without a guarantee of citizenship. Bangladesh authorities said they would not force them to go back.

Starting in 2019 and continuing during the year, authorities arrested hundreds of Rohingya in Ayeyarwady, Yangon, Bago, and Magwe Regions for traveling without permission, and charged them with violations of the Immigration Act. On April 8, a court dropped charges against more than 200 of those accused of leaving Rakhine State illegally, but according to activists, hundreds more remained in jails and youth detention centers across the country.

On November 2, Wirathu, a monk and chairperson of the Ma Ba Tha branch in Mandalay, surrendered to Yangon police on an arrest warrant issued in 2019 for criticism of State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. Numerous human rights groups described Wirathu's anti-Muslim and xenophobic rhetoric as hate speech.

According to international humanitarian NGOs, the government continued to tightly restrict outside access, including UN and NGO humanitarian aid and media, to northern Rakhine State, northern Shan, southern Chin, and Kachin States during the year. NGOs stated the government's travel authorization process for aid groups within the country effectively restricted aid and humanitarian access to displaced populations, in violation of international humanitarian law. During the year, the Red Cross Movement and World Food Program continued to maintain generally predictable access to meet life-saving emergency needs.

Multiple sources stated authorities and the military continued to single out Rohingya in northern Rakhine State to perform forced labor, including requiring them to transport soldiers, weapons and ammunition, and food supplies, and arbitrarily arrested them and imposed restrictions impeding their ability construct houses or religious buildings. According to reports, government officials were occasionally complicit with traffickers abducting Rohingya women and children in transit while fleeing violence, selling them into sex trafficking and forced marriage in India, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Authorities in northern Rakhine State reportedly continued to prohibit Rohingya from gathering publicly in groups of more than five persons, prior to the imposition of COVID-19 restrictions. Rohingya refugees reported that exceptions to the five-person regulation applied only to marketplaces and schools.

Armed conflict between the government and ethnic armed organizations in Kachin and northern Shan States, begun in 2011, continued. It was often difficult to categorize specific incidents as based solely on religious identity due to the close linkage between religion and ethnicity. The United Nations reported that 107,000 persons remained displaced during the year by conflict in Kachin and northern Shan States, where many Christians and individuals from other religious groups lived. According to the United Nations, 97,000 persons remained displaced in Kachin State and 20,000 in Shan State.

According to NGOs, both the government and nationalist monks used their influence and resources to build Buddhist infrastructure in majority Christian areas, including in Kachin and Chin States, against the wishes of the local population. Minority religious communities said they perceived these efforts to be part of a process of “Burmanization.”

According to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), authorities continued practicing discriminatory and abusive policies against members of religious minority groups. The CHRO said that Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region continued to face destruction of homes and places of worship and suffered physical violence by pro-military Buddhist nationalists, and that authorities prevented them from legally owning land and constructing religious buildings. The CHRO also said there were cases in which police failed to investigate or hold perpetrators to account for crimes against members of religious minority communities.

In Rakhine State, according to the United Nations and media reports, the situation remained unchanged from 2019, and government and security forces continued to restrict the movement of members of various ethnic and religious groups, particularly Rohingya. Restrictions governing the travel of persons whom the government considered foreigners, including both Muslim and Hindu Rohingya, some other Hindus living in Rakhine State, and others between townships in northern Rakhine State, varied depending on the township, usually requiring submission of an immigration form. The traveler could obtain this form only from the township of origin’s Immigration and National Registration Department and only if that person provided an original copy of a family list, temporary registration

card, and letters from two guarantors. The form typically authorized travel for two to four weeks but was given almost exclusively for medical emergencies, according to human rights activists. Sources stated obtaining travel permits often involved extortion and bribes. Muslims throughout the country still faced restrictions on travel into and out of Rakhine State and reportedly feared authorities would not allow them to leave Rakhine State if they were to visit the state. According to an August report by Burma Human Rights Network, 160 cases against 1,675 individuals were documented over four years of discriminatory prosecution against Rohingya for attempting to move freely in the country.

According to NGOs, such restrictions continued to impede the ability of Rohingya to pursue livelihoods and education, access markets, hospitals, and other services, and engage other communities. Sources stated that individuals stereotyped by security forces as appearing to be Muslim continued to receive additional scrutiny on their movements in the region, regardless of their actual religion; obtaining these travel permits often involved extortion and bribes.

According to various religious organizations and NGOs, the process to register an NGO, whether religious in nature or not, remained lengthy and often went uncompleted due largely to bureaucratic inefficiency in local governments. Some NGOs that tried to register reportedly found the process extremely onerous. According to *Myanmar Now*, a leading national news organization publishing in Burmese and English, the Internal Revenue Department required an NGO categorized as an “advocacy group” to pay tax if the department determined the NGO had made a “profit,” based on its tax return. NGOs voiced concern that new tax rules could place an unfair burden on small organizations and limit their operations.

According to the *Irrawaddy*, on July 7, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture ordered the removal of sitting Buddha statues in Nay Pyi Taw donated by members of the country’s former military regime because, it said, the stone idols were sculpted according to occult practices that contravene Theravada Buddhism, the country’s dominant religion.

According to the CHRO, the government continued not to issue permits for Christian religious groups to register and own land and properties. All such registration applications remained pending at year’s end, with some pending for more than 15 years.

Religious groups throughout the country, including Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and especially Muslims, continued to report difficulties and delays that could last for years in getting permits to allow construction of and repairs to religious buildings. Buddhist leaders said obtaining such permission was more difficult for non-Buddhist groups. Representatives of religious groups said the need for multiple permissions, unclear authority among government agencies, and interminable delays in responses to requests for permits led them to construct places of worship without the required permissions, leaving them vulnerable to future government action, often as a result of pressure by members of other religious groups. Others said it was necessary to bribe authorities to obtain permits.

In areas with few or no mosques, Muslims often conducted prayer services and other religious practices, such as teaching, in private homes. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture continued to restrict non-Buddhist religious teachings to government-approved religious buildings and prohibited prayer services and religious teaching in private homes.

Along with other houses of religious worship, mosques remained closed due to the COVID-19 outbreak as of the end of the year, although some authorities allowed limited renovation work to take place. In September 2019, some Muslim leaders formed a committee to press the government to reopen shuttered mosques across the country, most of which were closed by the government in the wake of 2012 communal Buddhist-Muslim violence in Rakhine State. The committee maintained a list of more than 40 shuttered mosques across the country. A 2019 list from the General Administration Department reported there were more than 800 mosques in Maungdaw Township, more than 400 in Buthidaung Township, and 10 in Rathedaung Township, all in northern Rakhine State. It was unknown how many of them had been shut down or destroyed. Twelve mosques and religious schools remained closed in Ayeyarwady, Mandalay, and Sagaing Regions, as well as in Shan State, according to the Burma Human Rights Network. A 2017 ban on prayers in eight Islamic schools in Thaketa Township in Yangon Region and the closure of two additional schools remained in force. Thirty-two mosques and religious schools in Yangon and Mandalay Regions remained closed. Human rights and Muslim groups reported that historic mosques in Meiktila in Mandalay Region, Hpa-An in Karen State, and other areas continued to deteriorate, in part because authorities denied permits to perform routine maintenance.

Muslims in Mandalay Region reported continued obstacles to rebuilding mosques after anti-Muslim violence in 2014. Authorities ordered mosques shut down after

the 2013 anti-Muslim riots in Meiktila, and they remained closed, as did mosques in Bago and Mandalay Regions. Some Hindu leaders also reported authorities continued to limit access to religious sites.

A Chin-based NGO again reported local authorities in Chin State and Sagaing Region continued to delay applications from Christian groups and churches seeking to buy land in the name of their religious organizations. Religious groups said individual members continued to circumvent this requirement by purchasing land in their own names on behalf of the group, a practice the government tolerated.

According to the CHRO, the General Administration Department in Mindat, Chin State continued to require organizers of religious events and activities involving domestic and international NGOs to seek permission at least two weeks in advance from the Chin State government. COVID-19 restrictions that remained in place at the end of the year, however, stopped all events.

According to the CHRO, in January and before COVID restrictions were in place, the Chin State government prohibited a religious gathering organized by the Chin Baptist Convention, the largest Christian organization in Chin State. The event was scheduled to take place in Mindat Township, Chin State, with a focus on peace and environmental issues. Despite the convention's having submitted a permission request in advance and having pledged not to discuss politics during the meeting, Chin State officials denied the request just prior to the scheduled start of the gathering.

While COVID-19 restrictions prevented most public events, sources said the government continued restrictions on both secular and religious civil society organizations holding public events in hotels and other venues, including requirements for advance notice of events and participants. NGOs sometimes turned to churches and other religious institutions in light of restrictions on the use of other venues. Many religious groups and NGOs said they preferred to receive written authorization from ward, township, and other local authorities before holding events to avoid last-minute cancellations.

Christian and Muslim groups seeking to build small places of worship on side streets or other inconspicuous locations continued to be able to do so only with approval from local authorities, according to religious groups.

The government continued to financially support Buddhist seminaries and Buddhist missionary activities. It continued to fund two state *sangha* universities in Yangon and Mandalay that trained Buddhist monks under the purview of the SSMNC, as well as the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in Yangon. According to religious organizations, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture financially supported the SSMNC and religious ceremonies.

Teachers at many government schools reportedly continued to require students to recite Buddhist prayers. Many classrooms displayed Buddhist altars or other Buddhist iconography. According to the CHRO, Christian students were required to convert to Buddhism to access so-called “Na Ta La” schools in Chin State, which were better funded than public schools. The CHRO described Na Ta La schools as a “state-sponsored religious and cultural assimilation program.” The national elementary school curriculum included lessons and textbooks containing discriminatory and incendiary material, according to UN and NGO reports. According to sources, one high school textbook still commonly used included a poem that read, “Horse, the color of a coconut shell / slave, [the red-brown color of a] kalar.”

Several Christian theological seminaries and Bible schools continued to operate, along with several Islamic madrassahs, in Yangon, Sagaing, and elsewhere.

Due to movement restrictions, many Rohingya could not access education in state-run schools. Rohingya and Kaman children in central Rakhine State had physical access to only one high school, located in Thet Kae Pyin, Sittwe Township, according to international observers. Authorities generally did not permit Rohingya high school graduates from Rakhine State and others living in IDP camps to travel outside the state to attend college or university. Authorities continued to bar any university students who did not possess citizenship cards from graduating, which disproportionately affected students from religious minorities, particularly Muslim students. These students could attend classes and take examinations but could not receive diplomas unless they had a citizenship card, the application for which required some religious minorities to identify as a “foreign” ethnic minority.

A Rakhine State government university program for Rohingya and Rakhine students – launched during the 2018-2019 school year and expected to expand during the 2020-2021 school year – allowed students to attend University of Sittwe-administered courses in a limited distance education program.

In December 2019, the Center for Diversity of National Harmony (CDNH) and the embassies of the Netherlands and Denmark launched a small scholarship program in Rakhine State that allowed 100 students, both Rakhine and Rohingya, to attend East Yangon University in Yangon. Previously, Rohingya students were required to attend the University of Yangon because of stated government concerns regarding security if they attended school in Sittwe. According to CDNH, the program was set to expand in the 2020-2021 school year.

Human rights organizations again reported that schools sometimes submitted citizenship applications on behalf of non-Muslim students while denying the same privilege to Muslim students. Muslim students, after submitting the applications, sometimes had to pay bribes to immigration officials to obtain documentation. According to Rohingya rights organizations, instructors reportedly made anti-Muslim comments in university classrooms. Muslim students typically were not permitted to join institutes for professional studies. One human rights group documented the teaching of racist and anti-Muslim tenets in schools throughout the country.

According to a 2019 report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, established by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2017, the government continued to prevent Rohingya and other Muslims from holding congregational prayers on Friday or during religious festivities in Rakhine State. Rohingya refugees reported they were unable to freely celebrate Eid al-Fitr or other religious holidays for the past seven years.

According to media reports, Yangon authorities requested that Muslims observe Ramadan at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic led to additional government restrictions on all forms of worship, including Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim, but sources reported punishments for violation were disproportionately meted out to religious minorities. In July, the government permitted limited worship with fewer than 30 people at a time. Before the COVID-19 pandemic led to the suspension of public events, the White Rose campaign – which grew in response to anti-Muslim activities in 2019 – conducted food distribution and a “Peace Biker” rally in Yangon during Ramadan.

Although Muslims said government authorities had granted limited permission to slaughter cows during Eid al-Adha in prior years, COVID-19 restrictions prevented this activity in 2020. Media and religious sources said that in previous years, local authorities in some villages had restricted the licensing and butchering of cattle by slaughterhouses, the vast majority of which were owned by Muslims. Community

leaders stated these restrictions negatively affected business operations and the ability of Muslims to celebrate Islamic holidays.

Sources continued to state that authorities generally did not enforce four laws passed in 2015 for the “protection of race and religion.”

Although there were no public reports of military donations to Ma Ba Tha during the year, according to the weekly newsmagazine *Frontier*, the military and military-linked Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) had a history of patronizing and funding Ma Ba Tha. In October remarks to *Frontier*, a monk active in Ma Ba Tha stated, “So what if Ma Ba Tha was funded by the USDP? It’s a charity organization. Everyone was welcome to support Ma Ba Tha’s mission and it is not fair to criticize the giving of donations to a Buddhist organization.”

On February 10, the military-aligned nationalist Buddhist organization Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) conferred its highest honor on the military’s Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing for protecting “race, language, [and] religion,” according to the newspaper *Myanmar Times*. On June 26, the YMBA issued a statement demanding “insults” to Buddhism, race, and religion must be stopped or be prosecuted, according to *Frontier*.

On January 26, Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Aung Ko said during a Myanmar Muslim Youth Gathering in Yangon that he wanted to reopen closed mosques and build a large new mosque in Yangon, but he feared the reaction of what he termed “ultranationalist thugs.”

The 2019 case against monk Myawaddy Sayadaw for defaming the military was ongoing at the end of the year. NGOs stated that Sayadaw was an active participant in various peacebuilding and interfaith efforts.

A 2005 local order in Maungdaw Township in northern Rakhine State remained in effect, requiring residents, predominately Rohingya, to obtain local authorization to marry. In addition, some Rohingya sources expressed concern about the two-child policy for Rohingya families, referring to a 2005 local order promulgated in northern Rakhine State and sporadically enforced.

According to civil society activists, Rohingya remained unable to obtain employment in any civil service positions.

Buddhists continued to make up nearly all senior officials within the military and civil service. Applications for civil service and military positions continued to require the applicant to list his or her religion. Applications by Muslims for government jobs were largely rejected, according to one human rights organization.

Buddhists continued to make up the vast majority of parliamentarians. There were 60 Christian and two Muslim members of parliament: Sithu Maung (Yangon constituency) and Win Mya (Mandalay constituency). Neither of the two was Rohingya. According to political observers, the exclusion of Rohingya in the political process was based more on animosity towards Rohingya as an ethnic group than on Rohingya as followers of Islam. Twenty-Five Muslim candidates competed in the November general elections, compared with none in 2017 and 2018. The Union Election Commission barred seven Rohingya politicians from running in the elections on the grounds that their parents did not hold citizenship. Activists noted the difficulty of attributing this to anti-Muslim (rather than anti-Rohingya ethnic group) sentiment, citing the fact that five Muslim candidates from the Kaman minority were allowed to run.

According to Fortify Rights, because of discriminatory documentation requirements, Rohingya were disenfranchised *en masse* in the November general elections, both Rohingya still living in Rakhine State and Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh. Second Vice President Henry Van Thio, a Chin Christian, continued to serve in his position, and the speakers of the upper and lower houses of parliament were Christian.

Authorities continued to require citizens and permanent residents to carry government-issued identification cards that permitted holders to access services and prove citizenship. These identification cards usually indicated religious affiliation and ethnicity. The government also required citizens to indicate their religion on certain official applications for documents such as passports, although passports themselves do not indicate the bearer's religion. Members of religious minorities, particularly Muslims, continued to face problems obtaining identification and citizenship cards. Some Muslims reported they were required to indicate a "foreign" ethnicity if they self-identified as Muslim on their application for a citizenship card.

The government continued to call for Rohingya to participate in the government's citizenship verification process and to apply for National Verification Cards (NVCs). The government said these cards were necessary to apply for citizenship

under the 1982 citizenship law. NGOs reported that Rohingya were pressured or coerced to accept NVCs. There were reports that government officials required Rohingya to have an NVC to fish or access banking services. Many Rohingya expressed distrust of the process; they said they were already citizens and that they feared the government would either not affirm their citizenship or would grant naturalized rather than full citizenship, which carried fewer rights. Some townships in Rakhine State continued to require Rohingya to identify as “Bengali” to apply for NVCs and listed “Bengali” as their race on their citizenship scrutiny card, also known as “pink card.” At least one NGO stated that NVCs were a method used by authorities to diminish the citizenship standing and future rights of Rohingya by indicating they were foreigners. The few Rohingya who received citizenship through this process said they did not receive significant rights or benefits, and consideration of their citizenship applications usually required significant bribes at different levels of government.

State-controlled media continued to frequently depict military and government officials and their family members paying respect to Buddhist monks; offering donations at pagodas; officiating at ceremonies to open, improve, restore, or maintain pagodas; and organizing “people’s donations” of money, food, and uncompensated labor to build or refurbish Buddhist shrines nationwide. The government published and distributed books on Buddhist religious instruction.

Statements from various government ministries and departments, including the President and State Counselor’s Office, highlighted discriminatory attitudes toward Rohingya, according to the NGO Progressive Voice. According to media reports, the military continued a coordinated effort to spread anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya sentiment through fictitious Facebook accounts and other social media. After media attention in July focused on a handful of cases of COVID-19 imported into Burma by Rohingya returning from Bangladesh, Kyaw Win, director of Burma Human Rights Network, said the narrative that Rohingya brought COVID-19 into Burma was an attempt to “divide the Rakhine and Rohingya community.”

On May 4, the government ordered all civil servants to stop using hate speech on social media and required civil servants to monitor and report online behavior to the central government. According to Radio Free Asia (RFA), civil society groups welcomed the move but were cautious about its intent and effect. Thet Swe Win, Executive Director of the Center for Youth and Social Harmony, told RFA, “We have noticed that the government has issued directives on hate speech in the past few days. This coincides with increasing international pressure, as they will soon

submit a report to the ICJ. They may be politically motivated to reduce international pressure, but otherwise these measures are very good in nature.”

In January, former President Thein Sein urged voters to consider the protection of “race, religion and military” as they looked toward the November election. NGOs said this phrase was well-known coded language used to encourage discrimination against Rohingya.

The government hosted conferences and attended events with a number of interfaith groups, including Religions for Peace, to promote reconciliation, peace, and development through national and local initiatives in its interfaith councils, the Interfaith Youth Network, and Women of Faith Network. Events included multireligious, multistakeholder Community Forums for Advancing Peace and Development in Pyaw, Bago Region, on February 19, and in Lashio, Shan State, on February 25. Religions for Peace participants included Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Sikh leaders.

In February, Vice President Myint Swe and other senior government officials participated in an interfaith conference organized by Religions for Peace in Loikaw, Kayah State. During the event, Myint Swe urged respect for the country’s different faiths.

According to NGOs, the government generally regulated foreign religious groups in a manner similar to nonreligious foreign aid groups. Local religious organizations were also able to send official invitations for visa purposes to clergy from faith-based groups overseas, and foreign religious visitors acquired either a tourist or business visa for entry. Authorities generally permitted Yangon-based religious groups to host international students and experts.

Actions by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

Some ethnic armed organizations operating in the country continued to pose a threat to ethnic and religious minority groups. The Arakan Army abducted Pastor Tun Nu at gunpoint in January 2019 in Rakhine State. After he was initially presumed dead, International Christian Concern reported he was released in March.

According to a Baptist leader, in October the UWSA, which controls the Wa Self-Administered Division in Shan State, again closed all churches and restricted home worship to a maximum of four families together amid other severe limits on

Christian worship, teaching, and proselytizing. In December 2019, the UWSA allowed at least some of the Baptist churches it forced to close in September 2018 to reopen, according to a local bishop. The national government exerted no authority inside Wa territory, under UWSA control since 1988.

Several churches in Paletwa Township, Chin State, ceased night worship services after the issuance of a night curfew order due to the threats posed by the Arakan Army, according to the CHRO. The CHRO described the threats as including targeting infrastructure, extortion, unlawful detentions, enforced disappearances, torture, and killings.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Local and international experts said deeply woven prejudices led to instances of abuse or discrimination against members of religious minorities by societal actors. Many prominent civilian and religious leaders continued to promote the idea that Burmese Buddhist culture was under assault by Islam and Muslims, who would come through the mountains of western Burma – northern Rakhine State where Rohingya live – and overwhelm Buddhist areas of the country.

According to Muslim leaders and civil society activists, opposition from Buddhist monks in Hpa-an, Karen State, prevented the construction or repair of any mosques and blocked Muslims from purchasing homes outside the traditional Muslim quarter, despite government approval. Monks exercised influence over local officials to prevent permits or construction despite higher-level government approval, according to religious and interfaith leaders.

Despite a continuing order by the SSMNC that no group or individual operate under the banner of Ma Ba Tha, some branches of the group continued to use the name Ma Ba Tha, while others used the new name, Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation. Many of the group's leaders and members continued to make pejorative and hateful statements against Muslims in sermons and through social media, including a July campaign in Mandalay that distributed stickers reading, "We don't want the NLD to make Myanmar a *kalar* country."

According to Burma Monitor, more than 100 Ma Ba Tha-affiliated candidates ran in the 2020 general election from various – mostly nationalist – parties, such as the Democratic Party of National Politics, the military-linked National Development Party, and the People's Pioneer Party. None of the candidates was elected to office. According to RFA, the parties' campaign posters contained three banyan

leaves – a symbol used by Burma’s Buddhist majority – and the slogan “No Rohingya.”

On February 9, hundreds of individuals, characterized as anti-Muslim ultranationalists by civil society and pro-tolerance activists, protested in Yangon as part of the newly formed and Ma Ba Tha-linked Myanmar Nationalist Organization, accusing the NLD-led government of failing to protect the country’s Buddhist majority, according to Reuters. Speakers at the rally protested against remarks made by Religious Affairs Minister Aung Ko, blaming him for criticizing the military-controlled Home Affairs Ministry for the government’s failure to arrest several nationalist figures for sedition and inciting violence. Protestors carried “No Rohingya” banners.

On December 28, “Bullet” Hla Shwe, a former USDP lawmaker and former military officer, who said in 2019 that the Prophet Mohammad would bomb the U.S. embassy if it posted “insulting images” of him, surrendered to Yangon police on a 2019 arrest warrant for sedition.

On April 3, police arrested three street artists in Kachin State for painting a mural that raised awareness about the coronavirus pandemic, according to Human Rights Watch. The artists were charged with violating the law criminalizing speech that “insults” religion after some Buddhists, described by interfaith activists as “hardliners,” said the mural, which portrayed a grim reaper figure spreading the COVID-19 virus, was wearing a robe that resembled those worn by Buddhist monks. On July 17, the artists were freed after charges were dropped.

According to local and international experts, Rohingya Muslims were perceived as not truly belonging to the country, irrespective of citizenship status, and belonging to a religion commonly viewed with fear and disdain. There were continued reports of social stigma surrounding any assistance to or sympathy for Rohingya. Some civil society leaders said that even among otherwise tolerant individuals, anti-Rohingya sentiment remained prevalent. There were continued reports of general anti-Muslim prejudice, including social pressure not to rent housing to Muslims in some areas.

On June 15, local media outlet *The Voice* ran a cartoon depicting a Rohingya man crossing the border carrying COVID-19 with him, accompanied by the derogatory label “illegal interloper,” a term frequently used to describe Rohingya.

Hate speech against Muslims continued to be widespread on social media. In September, Facebook said that in the second quarter of the year it had taken action against 280,000 pieces of content in Burma that violated its community standards regarding hate speech, with 97.8 percent detected by its systems before being reported, up from the 51,000 pieces of content it took action against in the first quarter.

Some Buddhist and Muslim community leaders in Mandalay continued to collaborate to quell rumors and prevent violence through formal and informal community-centered activities, such as informational exchanges, although most activities were curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Religious and community leaders and civil society activists organized intrafaith and interfaith events, and some worked jointly to develop mechanisms to monitor and counter hate speech and to promote religious tolerance and diversity. A coalition of interfaith civil society groups, including Article 19 and Free Expression Myanmar, continued advocating and consulting on draft legislation to counter hate speech, although parliament did not take up the legislation by year's end.

Monk Ashin Issariya, formerly known as “King Zero,” continued to lead the Anti-Adhamma Committee, a group of approximately 100 like-minded monks who preached against intolerance, confronted militant Buddhism from within the Buddhist clergy, and conducted interfaith outreach initiatives. According to interfaith activists, Issariya collaborated with other monks and lay activists, including Pyin Oo Lwin-based monks U Seintita and Thet Swe Win, who led the 2019 “White Rose” solidarity campaign with Muslims following a spate of communal violence in Yangon.

In Mandalay Region, civil society and interfaith leaders continued to hold meetings and public events for community leaders and youth aimed at promoting peace and religious tolerance, as in previous years, although such meetings were, in part, curtailed due to COVID-19. A number of interfaith groups continued mobilizing civil society around the country to promote religious tolerance.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Senior U.S. government officials – including the Secretary of State, the Acting Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, the USAID Administrator, the Ambassador to Burma, the Ambassador at Large for

International Religious Freedom, and senior Department of State officials for East Asia and human rights – consistently raised ongoing U.S. concerns about religious freedom in the country with senior government and military leaders. They specifically raised the plight of the overwhelmingly Muslim Rohingya in Rakhine State, hardships facing minority religious communities in Kachin, northern Shan, and Chin States amid ongoing military conflicts, and the advocacy on social media of violence against religious minorities.

U.S. visa restrictions imposed in July 2019 on the armed forces commander-in-chief, his deputy, and two brigadier generals for human rights violations against ethnic and religious minorities remained in force during the year, as did Global Magnitsky financial sanctions imposed in December 2019 on these same individuals for serious human rights abuses.

In March, the then-USAID Administrator said, “We have carried out groundbreaking initiatives aimed at helping religious and ethnic minorities recover from atrocities, [providing assistance to] the Rohingya in Burma and Bangladesh.”

In May, the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom warned that the Burmese military was denying Rohingya Muslims access to medical care and exposing them to the risk of complications in severe cases of COVID-19.

In February, when launching the International Religious Freedom Alliance to promote global religious freedom and respect human dignity, the Secretary of State noted the repression of religious freedom in Burma, stating, “We condemn terrorists and violent extremists who target religious minorities, [including] Muslims in Burma.”

The U.S. government continued to press for full accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations, including those concerning religious freedom.

The U.S. government advocated with senior Burmese government officials for the military to drop its legal action against a leading pro-tolerance monk for remarks critical of the military.

U.S. government officials continued to call for sustainable solutions to the root causes of discrimination and violence in Rakhine State, including a voluntary and transparent path to provision of citizenship, freedom of movement and access to services for IDPs, and unhindered access for humanitarian personnel and media in Rakhine and Kachin States. Embassy officials also urged government and

interfaith leaders to improve efforts to mitigate religiously motivated violence in Mandalay, Kachin, and elsewhere. Since August 2017, the U.S. government has provided more than \$820 million in humanitarian assistance in Bangladesh and Burma, including \$469 million in 2020, with \$78 million for programs in Burma, \$314 million for programs in Bangladesh, and \$29 million in regional crisis response.

Embassy officials at all levels emphasized the importance of addressing the effects of ethnoreligious violence and hate speech, including anti-Muslim rhetoric. Embassy officials promoted religious freedom and tolerance in meetings with high level government officials, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, the national security advisor, and the Ministers of International Cooperation; Religious Affairs; Home Affairs; Ethnic Affairs; Immigration, Population, and Labor Affairs; and Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement Affairs. Embassy officials also met with officials in the President's Office, the Speaker of the lower house of parliament, parliamentarians, and representatives of other governments.

Although embassy travel to ethnic and religious minority-predominant areas was curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions of religious freedom and tolerance with state and local government officials, NGOs, and members of community-based organizations and religious communities continued. Embassy staff visited Rakhine, Kachin, Chin, Shan and Karen States, areas where conflict or violence have affected religious minorities in recent years, as well as other areas that suffered from and were identified as vulnerable to ethnoreligious violence.

The embassy emphasized the need for respect for religious freedom, tolerance, and unity in its interactions with all sectors of society, in public engagements, and through its social media accounts. At high-profile events, embassy representatives spoke out for religious freedom and against intercommunal conflict and hate speech, including at panel discussions on U.S. First Amendment rights integral to freedom of religion and communal harmony. Embassy representatives, including the Ambassador, repeatedly met with Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu leaders, including ethnic minority religious leaders, members of faculties of theology, and other religiously affiliated organizations and NGOs, to advocate for religious freedom and tolerance. The embassy also shared multiple posts on Facebook to engage local audiences on the importance of religious pluralism, tolerance, and shared identity in democratic societies and in the United States.

The Ambassador gave interviews to local media and international media in which he discussed the need for accountability for the 2017 ethnic cleansing and

improved conditions for Rohingya and other minority groups. The embassy regularly published statements highlighting concerns about religiously-based tensions and anti-Muslim discrimination, as well as calling for respect for religious diversity, unity, and tolerance.

Public programs at embassy facilities in Yangon and Mandalay offered a platform for community leaders, media, students, and others to discuss intercommunal tolerance and respect, often featuring individuals from minority ethnic and religious communities, including a virtual Youth Forum on tolerance. The embassy hosted programs on digital and media literacy as a way to empower participants to reject online hate speech and the spread of rumors and other misinformation. As in prior years, the embassy worked with and supported numerous faith-based groups and NGOs working on programs promoting religious freedom and tolerance.

Since 1999, Burma has been designated as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom. On December 2, 2020, the Secretary of State redesignated Burma as a CPC and identified the following sanction that accompanied the designation: the existing ongoing arms embargo referenced in 22 CFR 126.1(a) pursuant to section 402(c) (5) of the Act.