

U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:
Russia

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RUSSIA

Section I. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, although the Constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, in practice the Government does not always respect the provision for equality of religions.

In December 1990, the Soviet Government adopted a law on religious freedom designed to put all religions on an equal basis. (After the breakup of the Soviet Union, this law became part of the Russian Federation's legal code.) The 1990 law forbade government interference in religion and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Registration of religious groups was not required, however, by registering groups obtained a number of advantages, for example, the ability to establish official places of worship or benefit from tax exemptions.

There are no reliable statistics that break down the country's population by denomination, but available information suggests that approximately half of all citizens consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians (although the vast majority of these persons are not regular churchgoers). An opinion poll of 1,500 respondents conducted by Public Opinion in April 1999 found that 55 percent of the population consider themselves Orthodox Christian, 9 percent are followers of another religion, and 31 percent say that they are atheists. Another poll of some 4,000 respondents by the Center of Sociological Studies at Moscow State University in the spring of 1999 found that 43 percent claimed to be Orthodox Christians, while 51 percent described themselves as "religious believers" (not necessarily Orthodox). A separate poll found that in Moscow only 20 percent of respondents who identify themselves as Orthodox are regular churchgoers, while in the regions only 7 percent attend church regularly. Also, January 1999 Ministry of Justice figures for registered religious organizations showed that over half of registered organizations were Russian Orthodox, 18 percent were Muslim, and 20 percent were Christian organizations other than Russian Orthodox. Jewish and Buddhist registered religious organizations each accounted for slightly less than 1 percent of the total number of organizations. Jehovah's Witnesses account for 1.5 percent of the total registered religious organizations, and the group reports that it has 250,000 members in the country. Ministry of Justice figures show that approximately 5,000 "nontraditional" organizations are registered nationwide, representing a broad range of denominations and religious practices. Nontraditional registered organizations include Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Evangelical Christian-Baptists, Roman Catholics, Hare Krishnas, Seventh-Day Adven-

tists, Lutherans, Baha'is, and splinter groups of Russian Orthodox Christianity, as well as 227 organizations representing less well-known denominations.

During the early and mid-1990's, many sectors of society, particularly nationalists and many members of the Russian Orthodox Church, were disturbed by a sharp increase in the activities of well-financed foreign missionaries. Many advocated limiting the activities of what they termed "nontraditional" religious groups and what were sometimes called "dangerous" or "totalitarian" sects.

In October 1997, the Government enacted a new, restrictive, and potentially discriminatory law on religion, which raised questions about the Government's commitment to international agreements honoring freedom of religion. Passage of the law prompted concern in the international community, because for the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Government had adopted legislation that could abridge fundamental human rights. This law replaced the progressive 1990 religion law that had helped facilitate a revival of religious activity.

The new law ostensibly targeted so-called "totalitarian sects" or dangerous religious cults. However, the intent of some of the law's sponsors appears to have been to discriminate against members of foreign and less well-established religions by making it difficult for them to manifest their beliefs through organized religious institutions. The critics of the law believe that the basic assumption behind the law is that religious groups must prove their innocence and their legitimacy before gaining the advantages of state recognition. Russian government officials, including President Boris Yeltsin and then-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, pledged that the law on religion would not result in any erosion of religious freedom in the country. Officials in the Presidential Administration and the Cabinet of Ministers have echoed and clarified these commitments during 1998 and the first half of 1999. They have taken a flexible approach to implementation of some of the law's most negative aspects and have shown some willingness to intervene with local authorities in defense of religious rights.

The law is very complex, with many ambiguous and contradictory provisions. On its face, the law creates various categories of religious communities with differing levels of legal status and privileges. The law distinguishes between religious "groups" and "organizations," two mutually exclusive registration categories, and creates two categories of organizations: "regional" and "centralized." A religious group is a congregation of worshipers that does not have the legal status of a juridical person, meaning that it cannot open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals, among other things. Groups are permitted to rent public spaces and hold services. Moreover, the law does not purport to abridge the rights of individual members of groups. For example, a member of a religious group could buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. However, in this case, the group would not enjoy tax benefits and other rights extended to religious organizations, such as proselytizing.

The law's most controversial provisions are those that limit the rights, activities, and status of religious groups existing in the country for less than 15 years. Groups that can prove their existence in the country for 15 years have the right to obtain the status of "local religious organizations." Similarly, congregations that had existed for 15 years when the new law was enacted also are eligible for registration as an organization. Organizations, both local and centralized, are considered juridical per-

sons, enjoy tax exemptions, and are permitted to proselytize, establish religious schools, host foreign religious workers, and publish literature.

Under the 1997 religion law, representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities. They are barred from conducting liturgical services and other religious activity unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. Although the law officially requires all foreign religious organizations to register, in practice foreign religious representatives' offices (those not registered under Russian law) have opened without registering or have been accredited to a registered Russian religious organization. However, these representative offices cannot carry out religious activities and do not have the status of a religious organization.

A "centralized religious organization" can be founded by a confession that has 3 functioning "local organizations" (each of which must have at least 10 members who are Russian citizens) in different regions. A centralized organization apparently has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without adhering to the 15-year rule. In implementing this provision, the Government has extended this definition to include a "registered centralized managing center." Centralized organizations also have been accorded the right to organize affiliated local organizations, which themselves do not comply with the 15-year rule.

Critics of the law have claimed that it violates the Constitution's provision of equality before the law of all confessions. In particular, many religious groups criticized the law's requirement that religious groups exist for 15 years before they can qualify for organization status. Also, many groups feared the consequences of the law's provisions limiting the actions of foreign religious missionaries. Representatives of some religions, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) and some Pentecostal and charismatic Christian groups, have said that their activities in the country could be halted under the law. The law furnishes regional officials with an instrument that has been interpreted and used by officials at the local level to restrict the activities of religious minorities.

Between February 12 and June 3, 1998, the Government issued three sets of regulations governing implementation of the new law. While providing procedural guidelines for registration, the regulations failed to clarify many key definitional points in the law.

In practice, the registration process--which involves simultaneous registration at both the federal and local levels--has proven for a number of confessions to be onerous and requires considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded Russian religious organizations, in particular, began the reregistration process soon after publication of the regulations governing reregistration. Russian Pentecostal groups, which have a solid and growing network of churches throughout the country, sought guidance from the Ministry of Justice on reregistration as early as November 1997. One of the larger organizations, the Russian Unified Fellowship of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (which traces its origins back to the early 1900's) reregistered as a centralized religious organization by late March 1998. It has since incorporated many smaller, newer Pentecostal groups within its structure.

According to Ministry of Justice figures, as of January 1999, 16,749 organizations representing over 57 confessions were registered in the country. As of April 1999, 130 organizations out of 400 had been reregistered at the federal level. As of the end of March 1999, an estimated 15,000 organizations

countrywide remained to be reregistered by the end of 1999, according to the Ministry of Justice. The delay in reregistration is due in part to the slow pace at which the Federal Ministry of Justice has disseminated the regulations and guidelines to local authorities and to understaffing both at the Ministry of Justice and at local levels. In many instances the Ministry of Justice has asked for additional information and has demanded changes in the organizational structure and by-laws of some groups to ensure that they are in conformance with the law. Also, smaller minority confessions sometimes feared the registration process, while others started the process late because they needed to agree internally on how to register their organizations in conformance with the law. Of 89 regions, 30 have laws and decrees on religion that violate the Constitution by restricting the activities of religious groups; presumably they would have to be changed. In the meantime, many local religious organizations continue to try to seek means of affiliating themselves with centralized organizations or confessions that can meet the 15-year rule and provide a protective legal cover. However, some individual local churches and religious orders, citing their theological and administrative independence, are reluctant to make themselves part of a larger organization. Under the new system, such religious communities face considerable legal disadvantages.

President Yeltsin and other high-ranking officials have stated consistently that the law would be applied in a liberal, tolerant manner, thereby preserving religious freedom and the equality of confessions. They insist that no mainstream religion already operating in the country would see its activities curtailed as a result of the new law. The full effect of the law on minority confessions or religions considered nontraditional is not expected to be clear until after December 31, 1999 (the deadline before which organizations registered under the old law are required to obtain new registration). To date no religious organization has ceased operations as a result of the law. Presidential administration officials have established consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and to monitor application of the law on religion. However, a federal government agency in the case of at least one religion has been responsible for significant restrictions on the activities of a church. In some areas, foreign Roman Catholic religious workers must return to their home countries every 3 months in order to renew their visas, unlike other foreign workers who can apply for multiple-entry visas or extend their stays.

Despite the Federal Government's efforts to implement the law liberally and to provide assurances that religious freedom would be observed, restrictions continued at the local level. The vagueness of the law and regulations, the contradictions between federal and local law, and varying interpretations furnish regional officials with a pretext to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Discriminatory practices at the local level are attributable to the increased decentralization of power and the relatively greater vulnerability of local governments to lobbying by majority religions, as well as to government inaction and discriminatory attitudes that are widely held in society. Concerns are mounting that a large number of religious organizations may remain unregistered by the end of 1999 and may therefore be even more vulnerable to attempts by local authorities to restrict their activities.

For example, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that local authorities were refusing to register some local Jehovah's Witness organizations pending federal level registration and the resolution of a Moscow municipal court case against the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law. Jehovah's Witnesses and religious rights activists welcomed the Ministry of Justice's April 30, 1999 decision to reregister Jehovah's Witnesses on the federal level. Federal level registration of the Jehovah's Witnesses apparently set a positive precedent for regions to follow--Jehovah's Witnesses

report that about 150 of their 250 local organizations have been registered either for the first time or reregistered. One notable exception is Moscow's Directorate of Justice, which has refused three applications for unclear reasons. Although there is no legal basis to do so, the Directorate may be refusing registration pending resolution of the outstanding civil case against the Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow. Now that the Ministry of Justice has sent guidance to the regions on registration of local religious organizations, Jehovah's Witnesses are cautiously optimistic that their 100 or so local organizations that remain to be registered can complete the process successfully. Some organizations that do not fit neatly into the registration provisions of the law are encountering trouble. For example, the Catholic religious order "Society of Jesus" (Jesuits) was denied federal level registration in April 1999 because of conflicts between the religion law's assumptions and the order's status within the Catholic Church as independent of the local bishop.

Although it can be a slow and costly process for religious groups, the judicial system has provided an appeal process for religious organizations threatened with loss of registration. Some local churches initially denied local registration have been registered following successful court battles, as in the case of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Khakassiya in November 1998, when the federal Supreme Court overturned the verdict of the Khakassiya Supreme Court. In February 1999, the Supreme Court of Khakassiya rejected the prosecutor general's request to nullify the registration of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission; the prosecutor plans to appeal the case. In July 1998, a local prosecutor opened a civil case against the Word of Life Pentecostal Church in the Far Eastern city of Magadan under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law, accusing the Church of using cult practices to manipulate its members. After a lengthy delay, a Magadan municipal court finally dismissed the case in May 1999 for insufficient evidence, a decision that was upheld in June 1999 by the Magadan oblast court. However, the Church fears that the same prosecutor soon may try to open a criminal case. The Church also won a court battle for reregistration in March 1999. A church member employed by the Government who was threatened with the loss of her job in late 1998 was still at her post as of June 1999. Church officials report that two other church members were fired because of their religion, but such allegations are difficult to prove. Also, a tax investigation opened against the Church in December 1998 continues. Church members reported that negative stories about them repeatedly appeared in the local state-controlled press, with no mention of their court victories. Despite these difficulties, the Word of Life Pentecostal Church continues its normal activities.

Since 1994 30 of 89 regional governments have passed restrictive laws and decrees intended to restrict the activities of religious groups. At the time the 1997 religion law was under discussion, its proponents argued that it was necessary in order to deal with the many restrictive local laws. The Federal Government has not challenged effectively the unconstitutionality of these restrictions, although the presidential administration sent warnings to 30 regions regarding the unconstitutionality of local laws. Critics contend that the Federal Government should be more active in reversing discriminatory actions taken at the local level and, when necessary, reprimanding the officials at fault. Also according to critics, the federal authorities need to take action to ensure that regional and local legislation or other actions do not contradict constitutional provisions protecting religious freedom. There are reports that some local and municipal governments prevented religious groups from using venues, such as cinemas, suitable for large gatherings. In many areas of the country, government-owned facilities are the only available venues. As a result, in some instances denominations that do not have their own property effectively have been denied the opportunity to practice their faith in large groups. For example, in the summer of 1998, local officials in Rostov-on-the-Don cancelled a rental agree-

ment permitting the Shield of Faith Pentecostal Church to sponsor a Jesus Festival concert in a sports complex. The chairman of the city's Department of Cossacks and Religion refused to permit the event. In September 1998, city authorities required a cinema to cancel its rental agreement with the Shield of Faith congregation. In June 1998, Canadian evangelist Viktor Hamm of the Billy Graham Evangelical Association cancelled an outdoor preaching event in Voronezh after city authorities denied the local sponsors of the event, the Evangelical Christian-Baptists, permission to hold the event. In August 1998, according to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources, authorities in Kasplya, in the Smolenski region, closed a Sunday school and prohibited worship services by the Evangelical Christian-Baptists. In September 1998, the director of the Moscow Technical College ordered guards not to admit an unregistered Baptist congregation onto the premises it had rented. The action allegedly stemmed from an intervention by the Federal Security Bureau (FSB), according to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources. According to Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow, late in April 1999 the Moscow northern district administration gathered theater and assembly hall managers and ordered them to refuse to lease their facilities to Jehovah's Witnesses. The Open Christianity private ecumenical school was evicted from its premises in St. Petersburg in March 1999 after a protracted battle with city officials about rights to the building, registration of the school, and the school's taxes. However, it is not clear that the school's religious orientation was at the root of city administration actions against it, and local government officials tried to relocate the school to an alternative site.

Some local executive authorities continued to cite the new law or local laws to obstruct religious groups' activities or to rescind their existing local registrations. Yaroslavl officials in January 1998 refused to register the New Generation Church, previously an unregistered underground church. Local officials cited the new law as the basis for their actions. In June 1998, according to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources, local authorities in Novosibirsk denied the registration of a Mennonite congregation, although it had been registered originally in 1970. According to reports dating from October 1998, local authorities in Osa in the Perm region pressured a Pentecostal church to register, although it was not required to do so, according to the 1997 religion law, if it identified itself as a "religious group." The group had met with resistance from the local Russian Orthodox priest and the local press. In November 1998, according to the United Church, its St. Petersburg branch was denied local registration after a federal court in St. Petersburg started proceedings against the Church. According to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources, in November 1998, the regional department of justice in Khabarovsk blocked three churches (Pentecostals, Methodists, and independent Protestants) from reregistering. In March 1999, an expert council of the Primorskiy kray administration declared that the Church of Christ was "destructive." It cited the group's proselytizing of minors without parental consent and other actions it believed to lead to the breakup of families. The council's declaration was sent to the prosecutor's office, which may decide to seek the liquidation of the group under the religion law, although no further action was taken on this case as of June 30, 1999.

In June 1999, the Directorate of Justice in Chelyabinsk again rejected the local registration application of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, based on the alleged incompatibility of church activities with federal law. Even without registration, the church continued to hold regular services without incident, although its missionaries have suspended their door-to-door canvassing and other outreach activities. If the Church remains unregistered, its missionaries would be forced to leave the country when their visas expire in September 1999. The Directorate of Justice also has rejected the registration applications of the Baptist, Adventist, and Pentecostal churches in Chelyabinsk on similar grounds.

Reports of harassment and punishment for religious belief or activity continued. For example, in January and February 1998, the Khakassiya Lutheran Church, the Khakassiya Christian Center, and the Yaroslavl New Generation Church received orders from local officials to suspend production and distribution of religious videos and publications and religious education. Some members of these Churches reported being fired from their jobs, beaten, and imprisoned for their religious affiliations. In July 1998, according to unconfirmed reports from religious press sources, the mayor of Novokuznetsk in Siberia barred Gideons from distributing New Testaments in schools, although their charter, approved by the Government, states that they may do so. In August and September 1998, local authorities and agents from the FSB harassed, repeatedly interrogated, and threatened with imprisonment a U.S. missionary from the Baptist Mid-Missions. FSB agents warned members of the autonomous Baptist Church affiliated with Baptist Mid-Missions to stop attending services, according to the Keston News Service. Despite legal registration, members of some religions, including some Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, continue to face discrimination in their ability to rent premises and conduct group activities. For example, in March 1999, local militia troops broke up services of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Chelyabinsk and interrogated seven missionaries. In April regional officials forbade the Church from holding services on Easter Sunday and threatened the church leader with arrest if he assembled his congregation that day. Nonetheless, the Church held its Easter Sunday services without incident. The Church applied unsuccessfully for local registration several times in Chelyabinsk, despite its registration at the federal level as a central religious organization.

Based on a complaint from the Committee to Save Youth from Totalitarian Cults (a group that reportedly has ties to the Russian Orthodox Church), a Moscow municipal procurator is seeking "liquidation" (i.e., termination of the organization as a legal entity) of the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses organization under Article 14 of the 1997 religion law for its alleged antisocial, antifamily character. This is the first proceeding in the judicial branch that attempted to suspend the operations of an existing religious organization at the local level. In March 1999, the trial was suspended pending review of the case by a panel of court-appointed religious experts. On June 28, 1999 the Moscow city court upheld the decision of the Golovinskiy municipal court to appoint an expert panel. Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow report that they still are being refused local registration and continue to have trouble leasing assembly space and obtaining the necessary permits to renovate their main building.

The Khakassiya and Yaroslavl cases form the basis of the constitutional challenge to the law on religion, filed with the Constitutional Court in May 1998 by the Institute for Religion and Law, a non-governmental organization (NGO). The petition challenges the constitutionality of the law's 15-year requirement and its limitations on the rights and activities of confessions that do not meet that requirement. The Constitutional Court accepted the case for review in November 1998, but a hearing is not expected to take place before autumn 1999.

Human rights activists welcomed a March 1999 open letter to the President and Duma by Russian Federation Human Rights Plenipotentiary Oleg Mironov, in which he criticized the 1997 religion law and recommended changes to bring it into accordance with the Constitution and international norms for religious freedom. (Mironov's office is a government entity created by the Parliament in 1997 that is dedicated to investigating complaints of human rights abuses.) Human rights activists contend that only 15 percent of actual violations of religious freedom are reported. According to various sources, most citizens, especially those living in the regions, are still skeptical about the protection of religious

freedom and are reluctant to assert their rights due to fear of retaliation. The Federal Government should be more active in reversing discriminatory actions taken at the local level and when necessary reprimanding the officials at fault. Along with everyone else, federal authorities and Moscow human rights activists often have limited information about what is happening in the regions.

The Vanino Baptist Church and its pastor, American citizen Dan Pollard, since March 1998 have fought a lengthy legal battle over registration in the Far Eastern region of Khabarovsk and to obtain the necessary permits for Pollard, or his temporary replacement Arthur Bristol, to remain in the country. Khabarovsk authorities maintained that the Baptist Church did not meet the 1997 religion law's requirement of over 15 years of existence and therefore could not be a sponsoring religious organization. To facilitate reregistration of the Vanino Baptist Church under the 1997 law, the Vanino Baptist Church and its lawyer negotiated an agreement to join the Russian Baptist Union. However, the Church's U.S. donor could not agree to this arrangement due to doctrinal differences. In May 1999, Pollard was refused a visa to return to the country. Bristol left in September 1998, reportedly due to harassment, surveillance, and threats.

The Moscow general procurator and approximately 70 members of the FSB, Federal Tax Police, and local police raided two locations of the Church of Scientology in Moscow on February 25, 1999. According to church officials, they confiscated documents, including tax records and priest-penitent privileged counseling records. The raids continued over 3 days. The tax police say that they are investigating possible tax evasion and other financial irregularities. Although there were earlier press reports that two church members were beaten, U.S. Embassy officials received no confirmation of this incident.

In April 1999, the prosecutor in Stavropol expelled eight foreign citizens for spreading Islamic fundamentalism, which it labeled "Wahhabism." Most of the expellees were from Syria.

Property disputes are some of the most frequent complaints cited by religious groups. For the most part synagogues, churches, and mosques have been returned to communities to be used for religious services. The Federal Government has met the requirements of the 1993 presidential decree on communal property restitution, and the decree continues to guide the ongoing process. According to statistics from the Ministry of State Property, over 2,000 federally-owned properties have been returned to religious communities since 1989. However, jurisdiction in most cases is at the regional level, and there is no centralized source of information on these cases. One Ministry of Culture official responsible for restitution of religious historical monuments estimated in early 1999 that over 3,600 transfers of religious buildings had occurred at the regional level and that approximately 30 percent of property designated for return has been transferred back to its original owners at both the federal and regional levels. Nonetheless, there continue to be reports of religious property that has not been returned. For example, the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Ryazan still has not been returned to the local Catholic community. The Moscow Patriarchate has claimed and taken possession of properties owned by other branches of Orthodoxy and, in certain cases, property of other religions. In some property disputes, religious buildings have been "privatized," and there are long delays in finding new locations for the current occupants, as required by law. Local authorities often refuse to get involved in property disputes, which they contend are between private organizations. Even where state or municipal authorities still have undisputed control of properties, a number of religious communities continue to meet significant obstacles when they request the return of religious buildings or when

they seek to acquire land and necessary building permits for new religious structures. Since February 1999, local authorities in Omsk have not responded to the Mormons' request to lease land, although local church leaders were continuing their efforts to locate a site.

Some Protestant faiths have suggested that the Russian Orthodox Church influences the Government regarding land allocated for churches of other sects. The Jewish community, which has met with some success on communal property restitution, faces the same obstacles as other religious communities and has concerns about the return of Torah scrolls, many of which are in state museum collections.

In its preamble (which government officials insist has no legal standing), the 1997 religion law recognizes the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." It accords "respect" to Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and certain other religions as an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage. Russian Orthodoxy is considered in conservative nationalist circles as the de facto official religion of the country. Many Russians firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is at the heart of what it means to be Russian.

The Russian Orthodox Church was involved actively in drafting the 1997 law on religion. It has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling to Russian military service members. These arrangements do not appear to be available to other religions. (In particular, Muslim religious leaders have complained that they are not permitted to minister to Muslim military service members.) The head of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, participates in most high-level official events and appears to have direct access to and influence with officials of the executive branch. The traditional view that Russian soil is an exclusively "Orthodox domain" leads to frequent criticism and intolerance of foreign religious groups that proselytize in the country. Many Orthodox Church officials condemn such "sheep stealing" when practiced by other Christian churches. Even well-established foreign religious organizations have been characterized by the Orthodox leadership as "dangerous and destructive sects" (see Section II).

Although Jews and Muslims continue to encounter prejudice and societal discrimination (see Section II), they generally have not been inhibited by the authorities in the free practice of their religion. Other religions, including Buddhism and Shamanism, are practiced in specific localities where they are rooted in local traditions.

At two public Communist Party rallies in October 1998, Duma Deputy and retired General Albert Makashov made blatantly anti-Semitic remarks, threatening to take the Jews "to the next world." In an October 20 newspaper article he blamed the financial crisis on the country's Jews. The Duma's Communists and their allies blocked a November 4, 1998 motion to censure Makashov, and despite an outcry against Makashov in the mass media, both the Duma and the KPRF refused to censure him.

On December 15, 1998, Viktor Ilyukhin, a Communist Party Duma member and chairman of the Duma Security Committee, accused President Yeltsin of "genocide" against the Russian people, "which would not have been possible if the entourage of Yeltsin and the country's previous governments had consisted basically of members of the native peoples rather than only members of the

Jewish nation." Communist Duma Deputies Makashov and Ilyukhin contributed to a climate of intolerance with their public anti-Semitic remarks. In a December 23, 1998, statement, Communist Party leader Gennadiy Zyuganov explained his party's position as "anti-Zionist," not anti-Semitic. Jewish groups believe that the Communists are using anti-Semitism as a political tool to build populist support.

President Yeltsin has spoken out repeatedly against anti-Semitic and extremist attitudes, including at the September 1998 dedication of a new memorial synagogue in Moscow. He said that it was "bitter to see that our own home-grown Fascists have emerged with their racial and national intolerance." The President's administration, the Government, and, in particular, the Russian media reacted immediately to the Communist Party's expressions of anti-Semitism. Communist Party leaders accused the press of conducting a smear campaign and threatened retribution. A December 16, 1998, presidential statement delivered to the Duma declared that "any attempt to insult ethnic groups, to limit the rights of citizens on the basis of origin, will be stopped in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the Russian Federation." On December 30, 1998, Yeltsin ordered cabinet officials responsible for law enforcement issues to prepare a comprehensive federal program against political and religious extremism by March 1, 1999.

On February 20, 1999, during a speech to the Movement for the Support of the Army in Novocherkassk, Makashov again made anti-Semitic remarks. Following the speech, the Rostov regional prosecutor refused to take action against Makashov.

During a March 1999 meeting with a delegation from the Anti-Defamation League, then-Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov publicly promised strong government action and new legislation to combat anti-Semitism and extremism, including new draft legislation. Later that month the Procurator General announced that he would press a criminal case against Makashov for his repeated openly anti-Semitic public remarks. However, Makashov cannot be prosecuted unless the Duma votes to lift his parliamentary immunity. In April 1999, the Ministry of Justice concluded that the Communist Party itself did not violate the law, since the statements of its members did not reflect the objectives of the party.

The Federal Government reports that it has moved forward on its promised initiatives against extremism and anti-Semitism. In November 1998, the Duma adopted a resolution against public statements damaging to interethnic relations in the country. The Government presented to the Duma a draft law on combating political extremism and also is drafting a law on national extremism. The Duma is considering a draft law forbidding "Nazi symbols and literature." Separately, the Procurator General already sent to regional procurators instructions to cut off distribution of any literature or printed material depicting Nazi symbols, and a letter describing the Moscow city procurator's experience in combating political extremism. The Government also reports that, in implementing the presidential decree on extremism, it conducted interagency consultations that involved the presidential administration, the judiciary, law enforcement organs, and experts from outside the Government. A government review of the implementation of existing laws against acts of national, racial, and religious hatred revealed that 25 criminal investigations were conducted in 1998 and that in 1999 10 were opened by June. Also, the Moscow city duma adopted a law forbidding the distribution and display of Nazi symbols in May 1999, and the Moscow regional duma passed similar legislation in June 1999.

Another prominent public figure who regularly engaged in anti-Semitic remarks was Krasnodar region governor Nikolay Kondratenko. Because of his position, Kondratenko has a seat in the upper house of Parliament. The governor's public speeches in the region often contain crude anti-Semitic remarks and stereotypes and blame Jews and alleged Jewish conspiracies for the country's problems. For example, Kondratenko has said that the essence of Russian history is the Russian battle against Jewish domination. He has blamed "Zionists" for the war in Chechnya, for the destruction of the Communist Party, for attacks on the Russian Orthodox Church, and for introducing homosexuality in the country. In addition, there have been credible reports that Kondratenko has urged the firing of Jewish public employees in the region. In July 1998, during a tour of the North Caucasus region, Justice Minister Pavel Krashennnikov criticized Kondratenko's statements, saying that they were meant to foment ethnic strife in the area, were scaring away foreign investment, and were destabilizing the entire region.

A report issued in October 1997 by the human rights group Memorial criticized Krasnodar government officials for "encouraging radical nationalist groups," including the Cossacks, and "indirectly inciting them to violence" against ethnic minority groups in the area. Local government authorities have sanctioned patrols by Cossack paramilitary groups in the name of law enforcement. Such groups are not publicly accountable, and their activities have resulted in human rights abuses (see Section II).

After his 1996 election, Kondratenko adopted a new regional charter that declares Krasnodar kray the "place of residence for the (ethnic) Russian people." He appointed Cossack "hetman" Vladimir Gromov as deputy governor of the region. In April 1997, Kondratenko and Gromov issued a resolution making Cossack groups subordinate to the regional government instead of to the State, according to the Center for Human Rights Advocacy (see Section II). The Center reported that President Yeltsin suspended this resolution in September 1997 on the grounds that it was unconstitutional.

The situation in Krasnodar drew the attention during 1998 of the Human Rights Chamber of the President's Political Consultative Council. The Chamber held hearings on the situation and demanded that federal law enforcement agencies intervene in Krasnodar and that criminal proceedings be launched against local authorities for inciting racial hatred. The extent or effectiveness of federal investigations of racial or ethnic provocations in Krasnodar is thus far unknown.

Jews continue to encounter societal discrimination, and government authorities have been criticized for insufficient action to counter it (see Section II).

On February 3, 1999, Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov declared Shari'a (Islamic law) to be in effect in the republic of Chechnya. Maskhadov signed several decrees stipulating that all local legislation be brought into line with the Koran and Shari'a regulations. Maskhadov ordered the Chechen legislature and the Council of Muftis to draft a Shari'a constitution within 1 month's time. The legislature also was stripped of its legislative functions and on February 10, 1999 was replaced with a 34-member Shura that has responsibility for "consulting" with the republic's president. The Shura includes several prominent opposition leaders. According to one expert, the Shura created in Chechnya is not a traditional Muslim Shura run by religious men, but instead is a council of military men.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and the local authorities continued to restrict the rights of some religious minorities in some regions.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

There were no reports of the forced religious conversion of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section II. Societal Attitudes

There is no large-scale movement to promote interfaith dialog, although on the local level different religious groups successfully collaborate on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialog. Not only the Russian Orthodox Church, but also Russian Pentecostal and Baptist organizations have been reluctant to support ecumenism. Traditionally, the Russian Orthodox Church has pursued interfaith dialog with other Christians on the international level.

Muslims, who constitute approximately 10 percent of the population, continue to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas where they are a minority.

There were many instances of violence in the North Caucasus, some of which had religious motivations. The threat of hostage-taking is extremely high in the North Caucasus. The motivation is primarily economic (ransom). For example, the Keston News Service reported that in April 1999 Abuzar Sumbulatov, a leading religious affairs official in Chechnya, was kidnaped from his home in Grozny. No ransom was demanded and Sumbulatov is presumed dead. The reasons for the kidnaping are unknown but Sumbulatov, a Muslim, was known for promoting religious tolerance. Sumbulatov criticized the Government in Moscow for attacking the Chechen cultural heritage by destroying university archives but also accused former Chechen president Jokhar Dudayev's government of deliberately allowing attacks on Chechnya's ethnic Russians. Sumbulatov's abduction followed several kidnappings of Russian Orthodox and Baptist clergy in Chechnya and bordering areas in 1998 and 1999 which, according to Keston, suggest that Christians are being targeted specifically. One kidnaped Baptist pastor later was found beheaded in March 1999, and another is feared dead. A youth leader of the Central Baptist Church in Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia was also kidnaped in March 1999. The Russian Baptist Union advised its members in 1998 to leave Chechnya. Three Russian Orthodox priests also were kidnaped in March 1999, two in Chechnya and one in Ingushetiya, and one later was released. A U.S. missionary was kidnaped in Dagestan in November 1998 and was released by his abductors in June 1999, after being tortured in order to extort ransom.

Following large-scale emigration over the last two decades, between 600,000 and 700,000 Jews remain in the country (0.5 percent of the total population). While Jewish emigration rates are significantly lower than in the Soviet period, the number of Jews emigrating to Israel for economic reasons as well as fear of persecution increased approximately 70 percent from January 1998 to January 1999. The vast majority of Jews--80 percent--live in Moscow or St. Petersburg. Jews continue to encounter societal discrimination, and government authorities have been criticized for insufficient action to counter it. There were several reports of major crimes or acts of intimidation linked to anti-Semitic

groups or motives during 1998 and the first half of 1999. For example, a large bomb exploded at the Marina Roshcha Synagogue in Moscow on May 13, 1998, injuring several construction workers at an adjoining construction site but no congregants. A previously unknown anti-Semitic organization claimed responsibility by providing television broadcasters with a videotape. Later allegations surfaced that the videotape had been faked. The attack was criticized by President Yeltsin, Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, and other national leaders. The city of Moscow offered to pay for repairs to the synagogue. However, as of June 30, 1999, no arrests had been made in the case. In another incident, 149 graves were desecrated at a Jewish cemetery in Irkutsk in May 1998. Swastikas were painted on the graves. The interior of the Jewish synagogue in Novosibirsk was ransacked and largely destroyed by vandals in March 1999. The vandals painted graffiti, including the swastika-like symbols and initials of the ultranationalist Russian National Unity (RNE) organization, on the interior walls of the synagogue. It was not clear whether RNE was responsible for the incident. Officials from neither the city nor regional government spoke out against the attack and no arrests were made in the case. In May 1999, a synagogue in Birobidzhan (the Jewish autonomous region) reportedly was vandalized by hooligans on two occasions. Also on May 1, 1999, two bombs exploded simultaneously near the Marina Roshcha Synagogue and the Moscow Choral Synagogue in Moscow. Federal authorities are unsure whether the attacks were motivated by anti-Semitism, but Jewish leaders are convinced that they were. Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin announced the next day that the Ministry had formed a joint team with the FSB to investigate the two bombings. No progress was reported in investigations of several incidents that occurred in 1996. Until recently there was little evidence to suggest that increased anti-Semitic rhetoric has led to increased violence, but observers in the country and abroad are watching closely to see if these most recent events are part of a pattern of intensified anti-Semitism.

The ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity paramilitary organization, led by Aleksandr Barkashov, appeared to extend its presence beyond its southern Russian stronghold during 1998. Although reliable figures on its membership are not available, the RNE claims a membership of 50,000 in 24 federation chapters. According to various pollsters, the radical movement appears to have won some degree of national name recognition and may enjoy the support of up to 3 percent of the population. RNE "uniformed" members were increasingly visible during 1998 at political and cultural public gatherings, but their day-to-day visibility on the streets and in public areas of Moscow had not been as obvious. However, on January 31, 1999, approximately 150 RNE members marched in Moscow in protest of Mayor Luzhkov's ban on holding an RNE congress in Moscow in December 1998. The march received a great deal of media coverage. In Borovichi the RNE and another local Fascist group, Myortvaya Voda, were active according to local Jewish leaders, and desecrated Jewish graves, mailed death threats to Jews, and hung anti-Semitic posters. The local Borovichi дума passed a decree in December 1998 prohibiting RNE activities and the distribution of its propaganda, and in March 1999 city and law enforcement officials formed a commission to counteract the RNE's activities and propaganda. In April 1999, officials from the Borovichi city administration invited the Harold Light Center, a Jewish NGO, to present a 2-day seminar on combating anti-Semitism and extremism.

The increased visibility of the RNE and other extremists across the country prompted government efforts to address the problem of extremism more forcefully. Moscow authorities banned the RNE from convening a congress in December 1998, citing the RNE's lack of credentials as a legally registered public organization at the time. (The Ministry of Justice twice had denied the RNE's registrati-

on.) The RNE subsequently managed to register but was then stripped of its registration by a Moscow court in April 1999. However, some observers called the municipal prosecutor's case weak and motivated only by the desire of city authorities to ban the organization.

Anti-Semitic themes continued to figure prominently in hundreds of extremist publications, and some politicians made anti-Semitic remarks. Jewish groups believe that the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) uses anti-Semitism as a political tool to build populist support. In October and December 1998, KPRF Duma members Makashov, Ilyukhin, and Zyuganov made anti-Semitic remarks, blamed the country's Jews for the economic crisis, called for quotas limiting the number of Jews in public office, and claimed that President Yeltsin's entourage is made up only of members of the "Jewish nation." Communist Duma members blocked a November 4, 1998 Duma motion to censure anti-Semitic remarks (also see Section I). Some Russian Jews believe that these public statements may have contributed to increased societal anti-Semitism.

Another prominent public figure who regularly engaged in anti-Semitic remarks was Krasnodar region governor Nikolay Kondratenko (see Section I). A report issued in October 1997 by the human rights group Memorial criticized Krasnodar government officials for "encouraging radical nationalist groups," including the Cossacks, and "indirectly inciting them to violence" against ethnic minority groups in the area. Local government authorities have sanctioned patrols by Cossack paramilitary groups in the name of law enforcement. Such groups are not publicly accountable, and their activities have resulted in human rights abuses. For example, in July 1998 Cossacks detained and whipped an Adventist distributing Bibles in a public park in Anapa in the Krasnodar region. The Cossacks refused to return the 60 Bibles that they had confiscated from him. In May 1999, Cossacks in Anapa also beat a man connected with a Catholic church in their efforts to stop construction of a new Catholic chapel. The man was hospitalized as a result of the beating. A local priest had received a threatening letter signed by the leader of a local Cossack organization demanding that construction of the chapel cease. The Church had all the necessary permits from local authorities to build the chapel.

After his 1996 election, Kondratenko appointed Cossack "hetman" Vladimir Gromov as deputy governor of the region. In April 1997, Kondratenko and Gromov issued a resolution making Cossack groups subordinate to the regional government instead of to the State, according to the Center for Human Rights Advocacy. According to the statements of the radical Cossack chieftain Ivan Bezguly, reported in the media, he has 44,000 Cossacks at his disposal ostensibly to enforce law and order. Estimates of the total number of Cossacks in Krasnodar are as high as 300,000. The Cossacks' tactics appear designed to brutalize and intimidate the area's ethnic minorities and to bring about the group's stated goal of cleansing the area of all nonslavic Russians.

In December 1998, the Ministry of Justice launched an investigation into the reported distribution of anti-Semitic leaflets in Krasnodar that called on the population to destroy the homes of Jews. The extent or effectiveness of federal investigations of racial or ethnic provocations in Krasnodar is thus far unknown.

Despite legal registration, members of some religions, including some Protestant groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, continued to face discrimination in their ability to rent premises and conduct group activities (see Section I).

In February 1999, Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksii II called for the continuation of the struggle against foreign religions, which he believed were threatening the spiritual health of the nation. In March 1999, the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church went on record that it considers the Church of Scientology to be a dangerous sect that can have a negative impact on individuals and families. A spokesman for the Patriarchate said that it wanted the activities of the Church of Scientology to be scrutinized by the appropriate legal entities. These comments came immediately after Moscow police raided the offices of the Church of Scientology (see Section I). In February 1999, Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad criticized Jehovah's Witnesses for their practice of proselytizing and accused the group of resorting to manipulation and psychological pressure. Metropolitan Kirill's comments came during the course of the civil trial against Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow (see Section I).

Occasionally, opposition to the dissemination of information came from religious groups. From time to time, the Russian Orthodox Church has criticized the press for what it called "anti-church publications," but stopped short of imposing any church sanctions against particular authors or editors. However, the Church appealed to authors of what it considered inaccurate accounts of church history to "realize the sinfulness of their evil deeds." Religious groups frequently complain of discriminatory stories in local press. While the scope of the problem is difficult to gauge, newspapers have published sensational or biased articles criticizing nontraditional religions. According to official government sources, in Yekaterinburg early in May 1998, Bishop Nikon of the Russian Orthodox Church issued an oral order to burn books by murdered Archpriest Aleksandr Men. The Bishop reportedly admitted that he ordered the "heretical" books to be destroyed in an attempt to protect the Church from free interpretations of the teachings of Jesus Christ. However, at least one Western diplomat in Yekaterinburg is convinced the incident never took place.

In June 1998, under pressure from the local Russian Orthodox Church and the regional administration in Sakhalin, Korean Presbyterian missionaries canceled a conference that was to bring together more than 100 Presbyterian and other Protestant missionaries from around the former Soviet Union. In August 1998, Russian Orthodox Priest Martiri Bagin was suspended from his duties for criticizing the 1997 religion law and for "having dealings with foreigners and other denominations." Another press account reported that Bagin was removed for disobedience and unsanctioned appropriation of real estate and noted that the "secretive" manner in which the Patriarchate handled the case led Bagin's supporters to say that the incident was a clampdown on dissent.

As foreign or so-called "nontraditional" religions in the country continue to grow, many Russians continue to feel hostility toward these "foreign sects," perhaps influenced by negative reports in the mass media and public criticism by Russian Orthodox Church officials and other influential figures. These sentiments appear to have sparked occasional harassment and even physical attacks. For example, in February 1999 Murmansk residents protested the construction of a mosque with a prominent minaret at a highly visible site. In Altay in March 1999, leaders of local organizations signed a petition protesting the construction of a Roman Catholic cathedral on Lake Teletskoye and accusing Catholic missionaries of engaging in brainwashing. The head of the Altay republican government has pledged to prevent the construction of a Catholic church in the region. In April 1999, in Chernyakhovsk in the Kaliningrad region, an Adventist pastor and his wife filed a criminal complaint against the sons of an influential Orthodox priest after the sons disrupted an Adventist meeting, beat the pastor's wife, and ripped her clothing in March 1999. However, the case was not investigated due to

lack of evidence. Mormons and Pentecostals have reported instances in which they may have been followed, harassed and, in at least one case, physically struck. There are believed to be more cases of such harassment than are reported.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Mission has been extremely active in promoting international religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the U.S. Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok have been active throughout the period covered by this report in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom, including anti-Semitic incidents. Working level U.S. Government officials engage a broad range of Russian officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis. These contacts include: representatives of over 20 religious confessions; the Institute for Religion and Law; lawyers representing religious groups; journalists; academics; former and current Russian government officials; and mainstream human rights activists long known for their commitment to religious freedom, such as Moscow Helsinki Group Chairman Lyudmila Alekseyeva, Father Gleb Yakunin, and Duma Deputy Valeriy Borshchev. In two more notable examples, an embassy observer was present every day during the Moscow municipal court trial of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1999, and a State Department officer traveled to the Russian far east city of Magadan to investigate allegations of religious persecution of Pentecostals (see Section I). The Embassy's political section uses a team approach to track religious issues, which involves the human rights officer, the rule of law officer, and the civil society officer (whose duties include religious affairs). This strategy allows the Embassy to offer a broad range of reporting and to provide continuous coverage even if one of the officers is absent. The Embassy's consular section, officers from the Agency for International Development, and representatives of the Immigration and Naturalization Service regularly cooperate with the political section to gather information on religious freedom in the country. U.S. embassy personnel travelling to the regions are encouraged to inquire into the local religious freedom situation.

Embassy officials at the chief of mission level discuss religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the presidential administration, Government, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs approximately every 6 weeks, raising specific cases of concern. Russian federal officials have responded by investigating and keeping embassy staff informed on issues they have raised. Immediately after the May 1998 Marina Roshcha Synagogue bombing, the Ambassador publicly criticized the act and visited the site. The Secretary of State criticized increased anti-Semitic rhetoric and discrimination against religious groups in her January 1999 speech to Moscow civic activists.

The Embassy and consulates also approach local officials at the working level on individual religious freedom cases. As implementation of the 1997 religion law continues, the Embassy maintains semi-weekly contact with working level officials at the Ministry of Justice. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Robert Seiple came to Russia in April 1999 and met with key Russian officials, religious groups, and human rights activists, a visit that underscored for Russians the high importance the U.S. Government continues to place on religious freedom.

In Washington as well as in Russia, the U.S. Government presses for adherence to international standards of religious liberty in the Russian Federation. Officials in the State Department regularly meet with human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about tolerance in Russia. The 1997

law on religious freedom has been the subject of numerous high-level communications between members of the executive branch of the U.S. Government and the Russian Government, involving the President, the Vice President, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and other senior U.S. officials. On November 24, 1998, Ambassador at Large Stephen Sestanovich, Special Advisor to the Secretary for the New Independent States, co-chaired a roundtable meeting with representatives of religious communities at the State Department together with Senator Gordon Smith, Ambassador Robert Seiple, and National Security Council Senior Director Carlos Pascual, which helped refine the policy that successfully urged the Russian Government in April 1999 to reregister Jehovah's Witnesses as a central religious organization. Ambassador Sestanovich had also chaired roundtables on religious freedom in Russia on February 24, 1998 and May 1, 1998. On January 21, 1999, Secretary Albright met with leaders of American Jewish organizations to discuss anti-Semitism in Russia and to outline how the U.S. Government works with the Russian Government to combat this problem. On March 18, 1999, Ambassador Sestanovich co-chaired another roundtable discussion on religious freedom in Russia, this time at the U.S. Congress with the participation of Senators Orrin Hatch and Gordon Smith, to seek out the views of NGO's on how best to promote tolerance in Russia. On April 14, 1999, in compliance with Section 572 of the FY 1999 Foreign Operations Act, the Secretary made a determination that the central authorities in Russia did not implement the law on religion in a manner intended to restrict the religious liberty of minority faiths. However, in the report that accompanied the Secretary's determination to the Congress, the Secretary noted that some local officials have used the 1997 law to restrict citizens' rights.

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