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Russia

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. Although the constitution provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state, the Government did not always respect these provisions.

Conditions deteriorated for some minority religious groups while remaining largely the same for most, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion for most of the population. Some federal agencies and many local authorities continued to restrict the rights of various religious minorities. Legal obstacles to registration under a complex 1997 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Associations" (1997 Law) continued to seriously disadvantage many religious groups considered nontraditional. The Moscow Golovinskiy Intermunicipal District Court cited the 1997 Law as the basis for its March 2004 decision banning Jehovah's Witnesses in Moscow, a decision that continued to have significant negative ramifications for the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses during the reporting period. There were indications that the security services, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), increasingly treated the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats.

Religious matters were not a source of social tension or problems for the large majority of citizens. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups, however, were negative in many regions, and there were manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as hostility toward Roman Catholics and other non-Orthodox Christian denominations. Some observant Muslims claimed harassment because of their faith. Instances of religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to determine whether xenophobic, religious, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is at the heart of their national identity. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC occasionally disseminated negative publications and held meetings throughout the country against other religions considered non-traditional in the country, including alternative Orthodox congregations. Some ROC clergy have stated publicly their opposition to any expansion of the presence of Roman Catholics, Protestants, and other non-Orthodox denominations.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and engages a number of religious groups, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The embassy and consulates work with NGOs to encourage the development of programs to sensitize officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. In many instances, federal and regional officials strongly support the implementation of these programs. The embassy and consulates maintain a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities through frequent communication and meetings. Mission officers look into possible violations of religious freedom and also raise the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the Foreign Ministry (MFA). During the reporting period, the U.S. ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He also attended events on major religious holidays and regularly met with a range of religious leaders. Other Department of State and U.S. government officials raised the treatment of minority religious groups with officials on many occasions.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 6,592,769 square miles, and its population is approximately 142.8 million. There were no reliable statistics that break down the population by denomination. Available information suggested approximately 70 percent of the residents considered themselves Russian Orthodox Christians, although the vast majority were not regular churchgoers. There were an estimated fourteen to twenty-three million Muslims, constituting approximately 14 percent of the population and forming the largest religious minority. The majority of Muslims lived in the Volga-Urals region--which included Tatarstan and Bashkortostan--and the North Caucasus, although Moscow, St. Petersburg, and parts of Siberia had notable Muslim populations as well. The Muslim communities in the Volga-Urals region and the North Caucasus are culturally and in some cases theologically distinct from one another and therefore must be considered separate communities.

According to the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, Protestants made up the second largest group of Christian

believers, with approximately 3,500 organizations and more than 2 million followers. An estimated 600,000 to 1 million Jews (0.5 percent of the population) remained, following large-scale emigration over the last two decades; the Federation of Jewish Communities (FJC) estimated that up to 500,000 Jews lived in Moscow and 100,000 in St. Petersburg. These estimates significantly exceeded the results of the official government census. Between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews lived in the so-called Jewish Autonomous Oblast (region), located in the Far East. The Catholic Church estimated that there were from 600,000 to 1.5 million Catholics in the country, figures that also exceeded government estimates. Buddhism is traditional to three regions: Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya; and the Buddhist Association of Russia estimated there were between 1.5 and 2 million Buddhists. In some areas, such as Yakutiya and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions were practiced independently or alongside other religions.

According to Human Rights Ombudsman Lukin's annual report, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) had registered 22,513 religious organizations as of December 2005, approximately 500 more than January 2005 (22,092), an increase of approximately 1,500 registered organizations since 2002 and more than 5,500 since 1997. As of December 2005, the Federal Registration Service recorded the number of registered religious groups as follows: Russian Orthodox Church--12,214 groups, Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church--43, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad--30, True Orthodox Church--42, Russian Orthodox Free Church--10, Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate)--11, Old Believers--285 (representing 4 different Old Believer denominations), Roman Catholic--251, Greek Catholic--4, Armenian Apostolic--68, Muslim--3,668, Buddhist--197, Jewish--284 (divided among Orthodox and Reform groups), Evangelical Christians--740, Baptist--965, Pentecostal--1,486, Seventh-day Adventist--652, other evangelical and charismatic groups--72, Lutheran--228 (divided among 4 groups), New Apostolic--80, Methodist--115, Reformist--5, Presbyterian--187, Anglican--1, Jehovah's Witnesses--408, Mennonite--10, Salvation Army--10, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)(Mormon) Church--53, Unification Church--9, Church of the "Sovereign" Icon of the Mother of God--27, Molokane--27, Dukhobor--0, Church of the Last Covenant--7, Church of Christ--19, Judeo-Christians--2, nondenominational Christian--12, Scientologist--1, Hindu--1, Krishna--78, Baha'i--19, Tantric--2, Taoist--5, Assyrian--2, Sikh--1, Shamanist--14, Karaites--1, Zoroastrian--1, Spiritual Unity (Tolstoyan)--1, Living Ethic (Rerikhian)--1, pagan--8, other confessions--155.

The number of registered religious organizations does not reflect the entire demography of religious believers. For example, due to legal restrictions, poor administrative procedures on the part of some local authorities, or disputes between religious organizations, an unknown number of groups have been unable to register or reregister; and other religious believers may not seek to be members of any organized religious group.

There were a large number of missionaries operating in the country, particularly from Protestant denominations.

An estimated 500 (official estimate) to more than 9,000 (Council of Muftis' estimate) Muslim organizations remained unregistered; some reportedly were defunct, but many, according to the Council of Muftis, have concluded that they did not require legal status and have postponed applying for financial reasons. Registration figures probably also underestimated the number of Pentecostal churches. As of May 2006, there were nearly 1,500 Pentecostal organizations officially registered (up from 1,467 in 2004) and 18 regional associations; statistics on the number of believers were unavailable. The difference in numbers can be explained by the fact that many Pentecostal churches remain unregistered. The Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists reported more than 1,000 registered churches, 549 unregistered groups, 7 regional associations, and more than 75,000 members. The Union of Seventh-Day Adventists estimated that there were 1,026 Adventist organizations in the country (more than 600 of them are registered with the Ministry of Justice) and more than 100,000 church followers. According to the Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (whose members included Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, and the Church of Christians of Evangelical Faith), there were 2,005 registered churches and unregistered groups, more than 180,000 members of the Church, and 67 regional central organizations. The total number of members of the Church and other evangelical believers was estimated at 320,000.

Some religious groups registered as social organizations because they were unable to do so as religious organizations. In 2005 the Association of Christian Unification Churches reported that the drop in its registered organizations from seventeen in 2003 to five was due to local authorities hindering the association's attempt to reregister its local organizations. In 2006, it continued to report 5 registered organizations, approximately 30 unregistered groups, and 1,000 believers. The Moscow Monthly Friends' Meeting (Quakers) was an officially registered organization, although as of May 2006, it apparently was registered under "other faiths," as there was no Quaker organization listed in the MOJ registry.

In practice, only a minority of citizens participated actively in any religion. Many who identified themselves as members of a faith participated in religious life rarely or not at all.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respected this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on certain groups. The constitution also provides for the equality of all religions before the law and the separation of church and state; however, the Government did not always respect this provision.

The 1997 Law declared all religions equal before the law, prohibited government interference in religion, and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Although the 1997 Law did not recognize a state religion, its preamble recognized Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and other religions as constituting an inseparable part of the country's historical heritage, and also recognized the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture." Public opinion widely considered Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism to be the only religions "traditional" to the country.

Implementing regulations took effect on April 10, 2006, for the Law on Public Associations (NGO Law), which President Putin signed on January 10, 2006. The 1997 Law remains the primary legislation governing religious organizations, but some provisions of the new NGO Law will apply to religious organizations as well. Although implementing regulations were in effect for too short a time in the reporting period to examine their effects on policy directives and subsequent implementation, the new law's inspection provisions are of particular concern since they appear to permit government inspections of religious organizations and attendance at some of their public events with advance notice. Although most of the provisions in the new law do not apply to religious organizations, the law appears to contain some provisions that apply, such as new reporting requirements; the authority for the registration body (located in the MOJ) to request certain documents, send its representatives to participate in events, and review on an annual basis compliance of an organizations' activities with its statutory goals; and a requirement that covered nonprofit organizations inform the registering body of changes to certain data within three days of the effectuation of the changes. In addition, the brief amendment to the Civil Code would also appear to reach religious organizations, but the effect of this amendment and all other amendments remains to be seen in how the authorities choose to implement the law. Local authorities in St. Petersburg, however, began an investigation of the Jehovah's Witnesses Administrative Center, even before the new law's implementing regulations were agreed upon, but citing the new law as the cause and indicating that they would find any irregularity that would permit them to close down the center.

On March 10, 2006, President Putin signed a controversial anti-terrorism law, which critics charged was vaguely-worded, especially the provision that permits the banning of any organization "whose purposes and actions include the propaganda, justification, and support of terrorism."

In January 2005 authorities amended the 1997 Law to conform to a new law on state registration of other legal entities. The amended law requires all registered local religious organizations to inform the Federal Registration Service (FRS) within three days of a change in its leadership or legal address. If a local organization fails to meet this requirement on two or more occasions, the FRSD can file suit to dissolve and deregister the organization. Some denominations with numerous local organizations feared that compliance with this change will be highly burdensome.

Neither the constitution nor the 1997 Law accords explicit privileges or advantages to the four "traditional" religions; however, many politicians and public figures argued for closer cooperation with them, and above all with the ROC. The ROC has entered into a number of agreements--some formal, others informal--with government ministries on such matters as guidelines for public education and law enforcement and customs decisions, giving the ROC far greater access than other religious groups to public institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, the FSB, and the army. In November 2004 the ROC and the MVD extended an earlier agreement pursuant to which the two entities cooperate in efforts to combat extremism, terrorism, and drug addiction. Such efforts include, for example, ROC support for the psychological rehabilitation of servicemen returning from conflict zones and the holding of religious services for those serving there.

Many government officials and citizens equate Russian Orthodoxy with the national identity. This belief appears to have manifested itself in the church-state relationship. For example, the ROC has made special arrangements with government agencies to conduct religious education and to provide spiritual counseling. These include agreements with the Ministries of Education, Defense, Health, Internal Affairs, and Emergency Situations, and other bodies, such as the Federal Tax Service, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces under the President. Not all of the details of these agreements were accessible, but available information indicated that the ROC received more favorable treatment than other denominations. Some government officials' public statements and anecdotal evidence from religious minorities suggested that increasingly since 1999, the ROC has enjoyed a status that approaches official. Although it was illegal, election campaign teams reportedly often included ROC clergy who frequently played a special role at official events at both the local and national level and who supported a close relationship with the State. Non-ordained ROC officials may participate in election campaigns but not as official church spokesmen. Nonetheless, policymakers remained divided on the State's proper relationship with the ROC and other churches.

The Rodina Duma faction and single-mandate deputies representing the People's Party have consistently supported a more official status for the ROC. The president, in contrast with his predecessors, has openly spoken of his belief in God, and greeted Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities on major religious holidays. He also meets periodically--last documented in September 2004--with members of the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations, which includes representatives of traditional religions and other major religious communities, such as the Protestants and Catholics, to discuss topical issues. Sergey Sobyanin, Chief of the Presidential Administration, headed the Council, and two Presidential Administration officials (Mikhail Ostrovskiy and Aleksandr Kudryavtsev) were Council members.

The 1997 Law ostensibly targets so-called totalitarian sects or dangerous religious cults, by making it difficult for

members of less well-established religions to set up religious organizations. Many officials in law enforcement and the legislative branches spoke of protecting the "spiritual security" of the country by discouraging the growth of "sects" and "cults," usually understood to include Protestant and newer religious movements. The 1997 Law is very complex, with many ambiguous provisions, creating various categories of religious communities with different levels of legal status and privileges. Most significantly, the law distinguishes between religious "groups" and "organizations." A religious "group" is not registered and consequently does not have the legal status of a juridical person; it may not open a bank account, own property, issue invitations to foreign guests, publish literature, enjoy tax benefits, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals and among the armed forces. However, individual members of a group may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In this way, authorities theoretically permitted groups to rent public spaces and hold services; however, in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encountered significant difficulty in doing so.

The 1997 Law provides that a group that has existed for fifteen years and has at least ten citizen members may register as a "local organization." It acquires the status of a juridical person and receives certain legal advantages. A group with three functioning local organizations in different regions may found a "centralized organization," which has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without meeting the fifteen-year-rule requirement.

The 1997 Law required all religious organizations registered under a more liberal 1990 law to reregister by December 31, 2000. In practice, this process, which involved simultaneous registration at the federal and local levels, required considerable time, effort, and legal expense. International and well-funded domestic religious organizations began to reregister soon after publication of the 1997 regulations; however, some Pentecostal congregations refused to register out of religious conviction, and some Muslim groups decided that they would not benefit from reregistering, according to spokespersons for the two most prominent muftis.

Representative offices of foreign religious organizations are required to register with state authorities, and they are barred from conducting services and other religious activities unless they have acquired the status of a group or organization. In practice, many foreign religious representative offices opened without registering or were accredited to a registered religious organization.

Under a 1999 amendment to the 1997 Law, groups that failed to reregister became subject to legal dissolution (often translated as "liquidation"), i.e., deprivation of juridical status. By the deadline for reregistration, the MOJ held an estimated 2,095 religious groups subject to dissolution and dissolved approximately 980 by May 2002, asserting they were defunct, but religious minorities and NGOs contended that a significant number were active. Complaints of involuntary dissolution have decreased in recent years in part because those who fought dissolution have already taken their cases to court; however, a few groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvation Army, the Unification Church and Scientologists, were still fighting their cases through the court system.

The 1997 Law gives officials the authority to ban religious groups. Unlike dissolution, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits all of the activities of a religious community. Authorities have not used the law to ban many groups to date. However, in a notable exception, the decision of a Moscow court judge in June 2004 to uphold on appeal the ban on Jehovah's Witnesses garnered significant media coverage and prompted an upswing in restrictions on Jehovah's Witnesses. As of April 2006, authorities permitted registration of Jehovah's Witnesses groups in 400 local communities in 72 regions, but problems with registration continued in some areas, notably Moscow, where the Moscow Golovinskiy Intermunicipal District Court and the Moscow City Court (of appeal) have banned them.

A lack of specific guidelines accompanying the 1997 Law contributed to inconsistent application at the local and regional levels. Local officials, reportedly often influenced either by close relations with local ROC authorities or the FSB, sometimes refused outright to register groups or created prohibitive obstacles to registration. There were indications that the Procurator General encouraged local prosecutors to challenge the registration of some minority religious groups.

The LDS Church succeeded in registering fifty-one local religious organizations as of the end of the reporting period. In 2005 authorities registered the LDS Church in Tver following a series of rejections of its application for registration. The group has not been able to register a local religious organization in Kazan, Tatarstan, since 1998 despite numerous attempts. In April 2006 the Federal Registration Service, part of the MOJ, restored the Salvation Army's registration documentation for the country-wide central religious organization. The legal position of its Moscow branch remained unresolved. Although the Constitutional Court found earlier rulings by Moscow courts dissolving the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army to be unconstitutional, the Moscow Oblast Department of Justice had not reregistered the organization by the end of the reporting period, and two of the court judgments that legally dissolved the applicant branch remained in force, despite the ruling of the Constitutional Court.

In a separate case, authorities had not enforced the Presnenskiy District Court ruling against the Salvation Army's registration, and according to the organization's Moscow office, it continued to operate based on documents filed under the old statute. The preface of the Presnenskiy Court's ruling refers to the Salvation Army as a "militarized organization." A textbook on religious culture prepared for use in schools repeats this definition of the Salvation Army, which it calls a "sect." The Slavic Center for Law and Justice (SCLJ) was working with the Moscow office of the Salvation Army to overturn the Presnenskiy Court ruling. The European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in June

2004 that the group's complaint that Moscow authorities had not allowed it to reregister was admissible; however, the court declared the rest of the complaints inadmissible. At the end of the reporting period, an ECHR decision on the merits was pending; however, the Salvation Army had not reported obstruction of its daily activities in Moscow.

Moscow authorities continued to deny reregistration to the Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology, threatening it with dissolution. The Scientologists countered the MOJ contention that the church had failed to reregister by the deadline by citing the 2002 Constitutional Court ruling in favor of the Salvation Army. Despite the court ruling against dissolution, the Government filed a supervisory appeal to the Supreme Court, which granted it, and remanded the case back to the trial court for new proceedings, in which the trial court ruled in the Government's favor. In February 2005, a Moscow appeals court ordered Moscow Oblast officials to permit the Church to submit an application for reregistration and to examine the application on its merits. Prior to this decision, the Church of Scientology had filed a suit with the ECHR against the dissolution order, which the ECHR found admissible in October 2004. The case was still pending in the ECHR. By June 2006 the Church had filed for reregistration eleven times; the Moscow registration service rejected the tenth claim on June 27, 2005.

According to the Church of Scientology, other than the reregistration case the Church has had no substantive problems with other government agencies in the country in general, such as the tax authorities, prosecutor's office, or police. They had good relations with the authorities, especially regarding the Church's Human Rights Campaign and Youth for Human Rights Campaign. Authorities regularly issued permits without problem for Church-sponsored human rights events and anti-drug events, which have the support of various agencies. Under the Church of Scientology umbrella there were approximately 100 registered groups promoting the Church's ideas and projects throughout the country.

In response to local authorities' repeated refusal to register the St. Petersburg branch of the Church of Scientology, the Church filed suit. The St. Petersburg registration service claimed that the document from the St. Petersburg District Authorities certifying that the Church of Scientology has existed in St. Petersburg for fifteen years was not "authentic," although it did not give a reason for its finding. Authorities postponed a hearing scheduled for May 2005 for procedural reasons until June 2005; due to the illness of the presiding judge, authorities postponed the June 2005 hearing indefinitely, and at the end of the reporting period no hearing date had been set.

Local authorities have impeded the operation of Scientology centers in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities. Since these centers have not existed for fifteen years, they were unable to register and cannot perform religious services (although they were allowed to hold meetings and seminars). The Churches of Scientology in Surgut City and Nizhnekamsk (Tatarstan) filed suits with the ECHR against the refusal of officials to register the churches based on the fifteen-year rule. The ECHR found the suits admissible in June 2005; the cases were awaiting a final decision.

The Council of Muftis indicated that registration was not an issue for Muslim organizations, and some regional Muslim organizations continued to operate without registration, such as the thirty-nine of forty-seven Muslim communities in the Stavropol region that operated without registration despite affiliation with a recognized regional Muslim administration. How many were unregistered by choice was unknown, but many Muslim organizations in the North Caucasus preferred not to be considered an official entity. The regions of Kabardino-Balkariya and Dagestan have local laws banning extremist religious activities, described as "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny registration to Muslim groups. The government in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the strongest Islamic areas, continued to encourage a Tatar cultural and religious revival while avoiding instituting confrontational religious policies.

The Unification Church reported that the requirements of a broad range of government agencies, involving fire inspection, tax inspection, and epidemiological inspection unduly complicated the registration process.

A 2002 "Law on Foreigners," which transferred much of the responsibility for visa affairs from the MFA to the MVD, appeared to disrupt the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers. Immediately after implementation of this law, nontraditional groups reported problems receiving long-term visas. Although the number of such problems appeared to decrease during the previous reporting period, such reports continued, most notably with the recent ousters of the principal legal advisor for the Unification Church in January 2006 and a fellow worker in the Urals in February 2006. The former had lived in Moscow since 1990. As in the latter case, the FSB inserts itself into matters dealing with visas and religion, particularly with groups it labels "dangerous cults and sects," distinctions that it reserves for some of these nontraditional groups.

Working groups within the Government continued to focus on introducing possible amendments to the controversial 1997 Law but had not introduced any by the end of the reporting period. Duma Deputy Aleksandr Chuyev was one of several officials who proposed legislative changes to formally grant special status to "traditional" religious denominations.

According to Federal Registration Service statistics, authorities investigated the activities of 3,526 religious organizations during the 2005 calendar year. The MOJ sent notifications of various violations to 2,996 religious organizations. The courts made decisions on liquidating fifty-nine local organizations for violations of constitutional norms and federal legislation during that period. The courts made no decisions on banning religious organizations. In

July 2004 the MOJ had reported that authorities had returned more than 4,000 churches and other property and more than 15,000 religious items to the ROC. No update on the latter was available.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities maintain consultative mechanisms to facilitate government interaction with religious communities and to monitor application of the 1997 Law. At the national level, groups interact with a special governmental commission on religion, which includes representatives from law enforcement bodies and government ministries. On broader policy questions, religious groups continued to deal with the Presidential Administration through a body known as the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Associations. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academic specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of traditional and major nontraditional groups. Other governmental bodies for religious affairs include a Governmental Commission for the Affairs of Religious Associations, headed by the Minister of Culture and Mass Communications. Under the President, there is also a Council for the Promotion of Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights.

Avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities also exist. The offices of some of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential Representatives (Polpreds) include sub-offices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials for liaison with religious organizations; it is at these administrative levels that religious minorities often encounter the greatest problems.

The Russian Academy of State Service works with religious freedom advocates, such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, to train regional and municipal officials in properly implementing the 1997 Law. The academy opens many of its conferences to international audiences.

The office of Federal Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin contains a department for religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints.

Representatives of some minority religions and many expert observers claimed that some government officials, particularly in the security services, believed minority religions--especially Muslims, Roman Catholics, some Protestant denominations, and other groups--were security threats, requiring greater monitoring and possibly greater control.

In 2004 Smolensk and Kursk Oblast authorities adopted local laws restricting missionary activity. Under these laws, foreigners visiting the region are forbidden to engage in missionary activity or to preach unless specifically allowed to do so according to their visas. There were no reports of enforcement.

Contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, allowed regional officials to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Many observers attributed discriminatory practices at the local level to the greater susceptibility of local governments than the federal government to the influence of local majority religious groups. There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in publicly discussing their religious views, but usually authorities resolved these instances quickly. Although President Putin's expressed desire for greater centralization of power and strengthening of the rule of law initially led to some improvements in religious freedom in the regions, as local laws were brought into conformity with federal laws, many localities appeared to implement their own policies with very little federal interference. When the federal government chooses to intervene, it works through the Procuracy, MOJ, Presidential Administration, and the courts, forcing regions to comply with federal law or not, depending on the political stakes, as with the Moscow Jehovah's Witnesses and Salvation Army cases. The Government only occasionally intervened to prevent or reverse discrimination at the local level.

During the reporting period, President Putin spoke out several times on the need to combat interethnic and interreligious intolerance, notably during the September 2005 UN General Assembly and during a February 2006 session of the Interior Ministry Council. He publicly condemned the January 2006 attack on a Moscow synagogue.

Officials met regularly during the reporting period with Rabbi Berl Lazar. In a January 2006 meeting, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the MFA was trying to fine-tune international dialogue dealing with the issues of how xenophobia and extremism can be countered at the international level. Lavrov also spoke out strongly against the January 2006 Moscow synagogue attack, stating that the root causes of xenophobia and anti-Semitism are deeper than law-enforcement agencies can cope with and that better education by the government religious groups, and public organizations could help address the problem. In a March 2005 meeting, President Putin pledged to make the fight against anti-Semitism a Government priority, and in an October 2004 meeting, he expressed support for the revival of Jewish communities. He also denounced anti-Semitism in several press interviews, usually to foreign media or while traveling outside the country. In April 2005 Rabbi Lazar met with Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov to discuss anti-Semitism and the state of Moscow's Jewish community. Luzhkov expressed concern about the growing number of extremist organizations and pledged the city's cooperation in fighting extremism. In April 2005, President Putin became the first Russian leader ever to visit Israel.

In March 2004, prominent rabbis Berl Lazar and Pinchas Goldschmidt came together to call on the Government to better define the meaning of "extremism." Lazar and Goldschmidt said that law enforcers were prone to dismiss anti-Semitic actions as simple hooliganism to avoid calling attention to their region as extremist-oriented and/or to consciously protect extremist groups with which they sympathized.

During the reporting period, new, more rigorous amendments to the existing Law on Countering Extremist Activity were working their way through the Federal Assembly, continuing the initiative begun by the March 2004 call by then Minister for Nationalities Vladimir Zorin, who called anti-Semitism and xenophobia major threats to the country, requiring stricter enforcement of the existing statutes outlawing extremism, such as Article 282 of the Criminal Code (which criminalizes the incitement of ethnic hatred). He also called for more programs to educate the public about anti-Semitism and to promote tolerance. Minister of Internal Affairs Rashid Nurgaliyev became the first high-level government official to acknowledge the existence of right-wing extremist youth groups. Combating this extremism was one of the top priority tasks for the MVD and FSB, he stated. These statements marked a positive step toward the Government's willingness to prosecute those who commit hate crimes, although few concrete moves have been made to solve many high-profile cases.

The Government does not require religious instruction in schools, but it continues to allow public usage of school buildings after hours for the ROC to provide religious instruction on a voluntary basis. The Government has backed off from a controversial proposal to introduce an optional course on the national level, "Foundations of Orthodox Culture," using a textbook that detailed Orthodox Christianity's contribution to the country's culture, with descriptions of some minority religions that members of those religions found objectionable. Although some schools still used the text, the Ministry of Education rejected further editions and circulation. Nevertheless, a significant number of regions continued to offer in public schools a course on Orthodoxy and may continue to do so because municipal administrations make school curriculum decisions. On the federal level, the Governmental Commission for the Affairs of Religious Associations at its December 21, 2005, session chaired by Minister of Culture Sokolov, supported, among other issues, the proposal of the Ministry of Culture to grant religious educational institutions the right to train public school teachers of religion. The proposal to teach "world religions" or a course on Orthodoxy in the schools remained controversial among experts, including those in the ROC. Nevertheless, the ROC in some communities (Kaluga Oblast and Yekaterinburg) was training local teachers in summer courses providing teachers with certification to teach "Foundations of Orthodox Culture." Some regions have begun offering a class on "History of Religion," a proposal that Education Minister Andrey Fursenko suggested but had not introduced nationally.

In July 2005 the subscriber services of satellite broadcasters NTV-Plus and Stream TV launched Spas (Savior) television channel, the first one in the country devoted to religion. It devotes 40 percent of its sixteen daily broadcasting hours to Russian Orthodox themes, with the rest of the time for general interest talk shows, documentaries, and educational programming. An advisory board including members of the parliament and senior figures from the Orthodox Church sets the channel's agenda and decides on programming strategies.

The constitution mandates the availability of alternative military service to those who refuse to bear arms for religious or other reasons of conscience. The law on alternative civil service took effect in January 2004, and two supplements to the law were issued in March 2004. The first supplement listed 722 organizations to which authorities may assign draftees for alternative service, and the second listed 283 activities that qualified. In June 2004 Prime Minister Fradkov signed regulations on the implementation of the law on alternative civilian service. According to the regulations, the standard alternative service term is forty-two months--versus the regular service term of twenty-four months--but the term is shorter, thirty-six months, if the draftee is assigned to a military organization. The required service for university graduates is twenty-one and eighteen months, respectively, in these situations. Some human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service for draftees requesting alternative assignments acts as a punishment for those who exercise their convictions.

The authorities permit Orthodox chapels and priests on army bases and also give Protestant groups access to military facilities, although on a limited basis. Authorities largely ban Islamic services in the military and generally do not give Muslim conscripts time for daily prayers or alternatives to pork-based meals. Some Muslim recruits serving in the army have reported that their fellow servicemen insulted and abused them on the basis of their religion.

In June 2004 authorities closed the federally targeted program on tolerance and anti-extremism ahead of its original 2005 end date. The program called for a large number of interagency measures, such as the review of federal and regional legislation on extremism, mandatory training for public officials to promote ethnic and religious tolerance, and new materials for use in public educational institutions.

With the registration of the Diocese of the Transfiguration in Novosibirsk in August 2005, the Roman Catholic Church completed the process of registration of the four existing Catholic dioceses (Moscow, Saratov, Irkutsk, and Novosibirsk). In 2003 President Putin stated publicly that secular authorities would do everything in their power to improve relations between the ROC and the Vatican.

Officials have encouraged a revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia with state subsidies for building Buddhist temples and training monks. The Government issued the Dalai Lama a visa, reversing previous denials of his visa requests.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Critics continue to identify several aspects of the 1997 Law on the grounds that it provided a legal basis for actions restricting religious freedom. In particular, they criticized the provisions requiring organizations to reregister,

establishing procedures for their dissolution, and allowing the Government to ban religious organizations. Critics also cited provisions that not only limit the rights of religious "groups" but also require that religious groups exist for fifteen years before they can qualify for "organization" status. Although the situation was somewhat better for groups that were registered before 1997, new groups were sometimes hindered in their ability to practice their faith. The federal government has attempted to apply the 1997 Law in a liberal fashion, and critics directed most of their allegations of restrictive practices at local officials. Implementation of the 1997 Law varied widely, depending on the attitude of local offices of the MOJ (responsible for registration, dissolution, and bans).

In February 2004 the Procuracy of Moscow's Northern Circuit banned the local organization of Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that it was a "threat to society," a basis for banning under the 1997 Law. Unlike dissolution, which involves only the loss of juridical status, a ban prohibits all of the activities of a religious community. In June 2004 a ban on all organized activity by Moscow's 10,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses took effect, marking one of the first times that such a ban had been implemented under the 1997 Law. Jehovah's Witnesses appealed the ruling, and although the judge admitted that members did not incite violent religious hatred, he accused the organization of "forcing families to disintegrate, violating the equal rights of parents in the upbringing of their children, violating the constitution and freedom of conscience, encouraging suicide, and inciting citizens to refuse both military and alternative service." In May 2005 authorities advised the Witnesses by telephone that the Presidium of the Moscow City Court had dismissed a subsequent appeal, although by the end of the reporting period, authorities had not sent official documentation of the dismissal or an explanation of its grounds. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) was considering their appeal, which was submitted in 2004. The ban, although applying only to Moscow, has had nationwide ramifications for the 133,000 Jehovah's Witnesses practicing in the country.

After the 2004 Moscow banning decisions, many local congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country reported that landlords had cancelled rental contracts on their buildings or were threatening to do so. During the reporting period, the Witnesses reported a problem similar to their June 2004 attempts to find a suitably large venue in Sochi, when a landlord denied access to a meeting venue after FSB pressure but later reversed the denial. In Moscow Oblast, which is a separate jurisdiction from the city of Moscow, the Witnesses reported a hotel conference center, a cinema, and a cultural center, each of which previously had been used by congregations of Witnesses, cancelled their leases.

Some landlords outside of the city of Moscow appeared to believe that the Moscow ban obligated them to cancel rental contracts with the Witnesses, as seen by incidents in 2005 in Roshchino (Leningrad Oblast), Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, Khabarovsk, and Ufa, where authorities disrupted or prevented assemblies. For example, in March 2005, reportedly under pressure from his superiors, the Director of the Palace of Culture in the village of Roshchino forced a group of Witnesses to change the venue of a religious celebration scheduled in the palace.

In some cases the Witnesses reported that authorities consulted with the ROC to determine whether to approve their requests. The Witnesses report that Father Valeriy of the Arkhangelsk Orthodox Diocese exerted pressure on Archangelsk authorities to prevent the Witnesses from holding a district convention scheduled for August 2005 similar to the Church's influence in Vladimir in 2004, in which venue use depended on approval from a local Russian Orthodox priest.

In April 2005, the Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk City Court dismissed the claim filed by the city prosecutor to declare invalid the registration of the local Witnesses' organization's title to the unfinished Kingdom Hall in that city. The Witnesses subsequently finished construction of the building and were able to use it for religious services. In February 2006 an internet agency, Regions.Ru, claimed that a group affiliated with the Yekaterinburg ROC diocese asked the court to ban Jehovah's Witnesses, a "totalitarian cult," because of "their destructive activities." In August 2005 the regional internet agency, UralPolit.Ru, reported that the Yekaterinburg ROC diocese was taking the Jehovah's Witnesses to court, seeking a ban, as "what already happened to them in Moscow." Nevertheless, the Jehovah's Witnesses in Yekaterinburg continued their activities as usual.

In April 2006 the news agency Kurskcity.ru published an article referring to the Moscow ban as an example to be followed and claiming that authorities could ban the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kursk. The article added that the Kursk City Council would discuss Jehovah's Witnesses harassment of citizens.

The Witnesses won appeals to overturn dissolution orders that lower courts issued as in November 2004, in Primorskiy Kray, and in October 2004, in Tatarstan. Jehovah's Witnesses cited five child custody cases in which courts have reportedly discriminated against their religion and in which the banning played a role. A court in Primorskiy Kray cited the Moscow ban in reversing a lower court's decision to award custody of a child to its mother, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses. In August 2004 the judge in a child custody case reportedly wrote to the Moscow court that ordered the banning of the Witnesses to request a copy of its decision. In November 2004 the father in a child custody case referred to the Moscow banning decision as one of the factors supporting his claim for custody. Some cases were resolved in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses mother.

In May 2004 the Civil Law Collegium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation upheld the decision of the Bashkortostan Supreme Court, which upheld in March 2004 a previous ruling against the local Church of Scientology Dianetics Center for conducting illegal medical and educational activities and of "harming people." Officials closed down the initial Ufa center, but the Scientologists formed a parallel Dianetics Center, which was operating openly;

however, the negative publicity and the local prosecutor's ongoing investigation led to a semi-underground existence.

There was no progress in the investigation of the January 2004 explosion in a building belonging to a congregation of unregistered Baptists (also called "Initsiativniki") in Tula. Anonymous threats caused the Tula Baptist community to believe the explosion was a terrorist attack, while local law enforcement authorities attributed a gas leak, although a gas company inspection reported no evidence of a gas leak. The authorities have long been suspicious of the Initsiativniki, whose complete refusal to cooperate with the Soviet authorities led to their split in 1961 from the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

Some human rights groups and religious minorities accused the Procurator General of encouraging legal action against a number of minority religions and for giving official support to materials that are biased against Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, the LDS Church, and others. There were credible reports that supporters of the ROC within the federal security services and other law enforcement agencies harassed certain minority religious groups, investigated them for purported criminal activity and violations of tax laws, and pressured landlords to renege on contracts. In some cases the security services were thought to have influenced the MOJ to reject registration applications.

Forum 18 reported that the FSB had summoned the leadership of an Old Believers' community in February 2004 to indicate the FSB's preference for a particular candidate for church leadership who lost the election. There were no reports of further FSB contact with the group.

Some religious personnel experienced visa and customs difficulties while entering or leaving the country, although such problems appeared to be decreasing for some groups. Authorities either deported or denied entry to several religious workers with valid visas during the period covered by this report, such as the January 9, 2006, deportation of the founder and legal/spiritual advisor of the Unification Church in Moscow, who may not reapply for a visa for five years, despite having lived in the country since 1990. During the previous reporting period, the Forum 18 news service reported that there were fifty-five cases of foreign religious workers of various religious groups who had been barred since 1998.

In March 2005 the Government denied entry to high-ranking British and Danish Salvation Army officials, Major Robert Garrard and Colonel Karl Lydholm, respectively, who sought to attend a church congress. In explaining its decision to deny entry, the Moscow city branch of the federal MVD cited the provision of law under which foreigners may be denied entry "in the interests of state security."

Visa problems appeared to decrease for some groups during the reporting period. Several groups, including the LDS and Roman Catholic churches, reported that the FSB issued most of their clergy one-year visas. Foreign religious workers without residency permits typically must go abroad once a year to renew their visas, usually back to their countries of origin; some receive multiple-entry visas or are able to extend their stays. Since the enactment of the Law on Foreigners and subsequent amendments that took effect in 2002, some religious workers reported difficulty in obtaining visas with terms longer than three months (even if they had previously held visas with one-year validity). The curtailed validity has led some religious groups to begin shuttling their missionaries in and out of the country every three months, presenting a financial and spiritual hardship for such groups. Missionaries under such restrictions must pay for travel back to their countries of origin, often not knowing if they may return. As a result, many missionary groups must find and maintain two workers for every position if one is to be available for ministry while the other is outside the country applying for a visa renewal.

Foreign clergy are particularly important for the Roman Catholic Church in the country, since there are only a relatively small number of ordained Russian nationals, primarily because the Soviets only allowed two Catholic parishes and no seminaries to function in Soviet times. The first local citizens that the church trained as Catholic priests since the end of the Soviet regime graduated in 1999. At the end of the reporting period, there were approximately 270 Catholic priests working in the country, with only 10 percent of them citizens, and approximately 220 officially registered Catholic parishes.

One of the eight Catholic clergy the Government barred since 1998, Polish Catholic priest Father Janusz Blaut, to whom authorities refused a visa in October 2004 after he worked in North Ossetia for ten years, returned to the republic's capital Vladikavkaz in autumn 2005. Foreign Catholic clergy in the Krasnodar region now hold one-year visas rather than three-month visas that authorities issued from mid-2002 to mid-2004. Another priest denied entry, Polish citizen Father Edward Mackiewicz, in effect, exchanged his Rostov-on-Don parish with that of Father Michal Nickowski in western Ukraine, who, as a Ukrainian citizen, may remain in the country without a visa for up to three months. Officials granted Father Jerzy Steckiewicz, leader of the parish in Kaliningrad, a tourist visa valid only for that region, rather than a religious visa, making it impossible for him to travel in the rest of the country. Otherwise, Catholic authorities reported a decrease in visa problems for priests during the period covered by this report.

Officials annulled the visa of Moscow chief rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt in September 2005, denied a visa to South African Protestant church overseer Hugo Van Niekerk in July 2005, and revoked the visa of German Lutheran bishop Siegfried Springer in April 2005. All subsequently received visas and returned.

As was the case for the previous reporting year, the LDS Church reported few visa problems for their foreign

missionaries and that virtually all of them received one-year, multiple-entry visas. The LDS Church occasionally had difficulties in securing residency permits for missionaries but noted this varied from region to region and was not systemic. There were few reports of religious workers of minority religious groups having difficulties registering their visas with the local authorities, as required by law.

In December 2003 the Unification Church reported that it appealed to the ECHR the Government's 2002 denial of a visa to church member Patrick Nolan. This case has not yet been ruled on. In 2003, Nolan lost both a trial court case and an appeal before the Supreme Court. Missionaries with the Swedish Evangelical Church in Krasnodar, the OMS Christian organization, the Christian Church in Kostroma, and the Kostroma "Family of God" Pentecostal Church, to whom officials denied visas in past years, did not return. In some cases, officials denied visa renewals for those living there for up to nine years.

While most conscripts seeking exemptions from military service sought medical or student exemptions, the courts provided relief to some on the grounds of religious conviction. The question of conscientious objector status arose most frequently with respect to Jehovah's Witnesses, under the new legal regime which took effect in spring 2004 governing alternative civilian service (ACS). In February 2006 officials from the Federal Services for Labor and Employment and the Department for the Organization and Control of Alternative Civilian Service in Moscow reported that approximately 640 individuals were performing ACS, 70 percent of whom were Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses were aware of 192 Jehovah's Witnesses performing ACS. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses reported that draft commissioners more willingly appointed them to ACS than in the past, and they did not face the same pressure to unwillingly perform military service as they did previously. Since ACS formation, 197 Witnesses have refused it; there were 37 ongoing cases against Witnesses for avoidance of ACS, and the courts convicted 41 Witnesses of evasion, and either fined them (between 100 dollars and 1,000 dollars or approximately 2,700 rubles and 27,000 rubles, respectively) or sentenced them to perform community service (up to 210 hours). Jehovah's Witnesses were aware of only two criminal cases that authorities had instigated against Witnesses for evasion of military service. At the end of this reporting period, authorities had imprisoned no Witnesses for failure to perform ACS.

In Bashkortostan, the Supreme Court sustained the refusal of exemption for Jehovah's Witness Marsel Faizov due to his criminal background. The ECHR accepted this case in March 2006. The Government filed its observations on June 27, 2006. Faizov had until September 1, 2006, to provide his reply to the Government's observations. However, to Jehovah's Witnesses' knowledge the Supreme Court of Bashkortostan had not reconsidered the case, and it was not clear when it would do so.

Some religious groups reported problems with religious properties. In March 2005 a St. Petersburg court dismissed the Witnesses' suit in litigation since 1999 seeking permission to remodel a building it owned on Pogranichnika Gar'kavogo Street for use as a prayer center. As of the end of the reporting period, the Witnesses reported that they were selling the property and had opened another meeting place.

Although in 2004 authorities in Velikiy Novgorod held a meeting favorable in its public response to Jehovah's Witnesses' request to acquire land to construct a lecture hall, the city denied permission, informing them in April 2005 that the city would not review the denial. During the reporting period, the local authorities continued to dismiss the congregation's repeated requests for information on available plots of land.

Following a March 2004 referendum in Sosnovyy Bor (Leningrad Oblast), local authorities refused to let a Jehovah's Witnesses community use land to construct a place of worship. At the end of the reporting period, the congregation had not been able to obtain permission from the authorities to build a place of worship and was using a privately owned building to hold their meetings. On May 5, 2006, Mayskaya Gorka City Circuit in the Arkhangelsk region held a public meeting to discuss a Jehovah's Witness application for a plot of land to build a place of worship. A large crowd gathered for the hearing, including members of political groups and three local ROC priests. Reports indicate that the atmosphere was hostile, not giving the representatives of the Witnesses the opportunity to reply to all the questions, the majority of which were about religious beliefs rather than plans for the land. The mob chanted "Down with the sect," among other verbal abuses. ROC representatives reportedly made allegations that Jehovah's Witnesses are forbidden to speak to their non-Witness relatives and called it a sect that one cannot leave voluntarily and that destroys families. At the conclusion of the meeting, those present voted not to provide Jehovah's Witnesses with a plot of land.

The Jehovah's Witnesses successful attempt to build a Kingdom Hall in Zlatoust in the Chelyabinsk region is an example of federal authorities intervening at the local level through the court system. The local administration provided the Jehovah's Witnesses with a plot of land, but when construction began in June 2005, local residents filed complaints with the authorities, and the prosecutor initiated an administrative case against the Jehovah's Witnesses. Over the next four months, local city officials claimed the building was unlawful since the Witnesses did not adequately inform the public of their intentions, and there was no expert environmental study of the site. Local authorities felt the Jehovah's Witnesses should destroy the building at their own expense. Although the Zlatoust prosecutor served the Jehovah's Witnesses with a warning to cease infringement of the 1997 Law, the Chelyabinsk Regional Arbitration Court decided in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In January 2006 the Chelyabinsk Region Department of State Environmental Control produced a site impact conclusion unsupportive of the Jehovah's Witnesses, prompting them to request a second ecological expert study. In

February 2006 the Chelyabinsk Region Directorate of the Federal Service for Control of Nature Management's expert ecological study supported the construction project. Following this change, the arbitration court continued hearing the case. The city administration argued that the Kingdom Hall in Zlatoust should be declared illegal and destroyed and produced a letter from the Chelyabinsk Region Federal Registration Service (FRS) stating that the Jehovah's Witnesses had violated the 1997 Law. The court dismissed the motion as well as the city administration's application to demand demolition at the expense of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The city administration did not appeal the decision.

There was no change in the situation during the reporting period for the LDS Church, whose leaders confirmed press reports that in August 2004 a local Cossack group organized a protest against plans for the construction of a meetinghouse in Saratov city. Muslim and ROC leaders also spoke out against the construction. Although the church had received construction permits for the project, the city stopped construction, and did not permit it to resume.

According to a May 2005 article in the Perm newspaper *Permskiy Obozrevatel*, in late 2004 the Pentecostal New Testament Church in Perm purchased the local House of Culture from a private company to house its social and charitable activities. The purchase provoked considerable controversy in the area, reportedly encouraged in part by the local ROC Bishop Irinarkh, a long-time critic of Pentecostals. The case went to an arbitration court, which ultimately recognized the sale as legal and valid but did not issue a ruling that would bind the owner to proceed with the registration. The Pentecostals paid 50 million rubles (\$1,851,851) for the House of Culture and were using it for their services, but they were not registered as the owners at the end of the reporting period. According to Pastor Eduard Grabovenko, oblast administration officials had put pressure on the owner to block registration. On May 11, 2006, the New Testament Church filed a suit asking the court to issue an order that would permit property rights registration without the former owner's cooperation.

In late May 2006 a meeting between Perm Governor Oleg Chirkunov and the chairman of the Russian Pentecostal Union Sergey Ryakhovskiy brought no results. However, according to a representative of the Russian Pentecostal Union, the problem of the building was later resolved successfully. In April 2006 the Arbitration Court ruled in favor of the Pentecostal community and ordered the selling party to complete the building sale; however, the Perm Kray Committee on Culture appealed, creating at least a month's postponement of the final decision. As a result of an appeal by some local organizations to return the House of Culture to the administration in exchange for another building, the Pentecostal community agreed, and the problem became one of finding an appropriate new building for them.

In May 2006 the Moscow Arbitration Court decided in favor of the Charismatic Kingdom of God Church, in a suit that the Federal Property Agency filed in December 2005 asking the court to obtain on demand its "illegally occupied" property in the capital. According to the suit, the privatized factory, which sold its former social center and sports hall to the church in December 1997, had no right to do so "since the owner of the building ... is the Russian Federation." In its decision the court said that the Government had no ownership rights over the property, that the church possessed a valid state certificate registering its rights to the property, and that the deadline for legal challenges--three years from the point of sale--had in any case long expired.

Contrary to previous reports, the Voronezh Lutheran Community reported it had been discussing with local ROC representatives the return of their church building, although it was expected that this process would take considerable time to complete.

Religious news sources claimed that authorities acting on behalf of the ROC sometimes prevented Orthodox churches not belonging to the ROC, including the True Orthodox, from obtaining or maintaining buildings for worship. In April 2005 the court ordered the Church of St. Olga in Zheleznovodsk, which the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church (ROAC) first registered in 1944 at the same address, transferred to the authority of the ROC Diocese of Stavropol despite the ROAC congregation's renovation and reconstruction of the building at the same site. Cossacks implemented the decision in April 2006, which forced the ROAC to conduct its Easter service outside while the church building stood empty of parishioners, since the local community belongs to the ROAC, not the ROC. The protesting of the church transfer and informing the international community led to the beating of Metropolitan Valentine (see the Abuse section) as well as threats to the ROAC clergy.

On June 2, 2006, media and Hare Krishna representatives reported that Moscow City authorities approved the allotment of land for the construction of a Krishna temple. Reports indicated that the promise was part of a joint statement by the Mayor of Moscow and the Delhi Chief Minister, who hoped to enhance trade and economic cooperation. Moscow's estimated 10,000 Hare Krishna devotees shared their temple with at least 5,000 Indians, Sri Lankans, Nepalese, and Mauritians of other Hindu denominations. This followed the Moscow authorities' sudden October 7, 2005, withdrawal of permission for the new temple's construction. The Hare Krishna community was left, until the recent accord between the two city governments, using temporary accommodation on the construction site. Having spent more than \$74, 074 (two million rubles) on the project and approved an architectural design with considerable difficulty due to its distinctiveness from the surrounding buildings on Leningradskiy Prospekt, the Hare Krishna devotees subsequently turned to Moscow's Arbitration Court. The status of the appeal remained unclear in light of the accord, but while their appeal was being heard, the community cannot be evicted from the site, even though Moscow's land committee ordered it to leave in January 2006. In withdrawing their permission, the city authorities cited paperwork errors involving the terms of land usage.

Already demolished as part of a municipal building program, the Hare Krishna community's previous Moscow temple premises were a gift in 1989 as part of the confession's rehabilitation in the late Soviet period. (In the early 1980s the Soviets incarcerated approximately fifty of its members in prisons and psychiatric institutions.) Authorities offered the current site as compensation for the demolition of the previous temple. They have permission to remain on their current site until ready to move to the new location. The question of architecture remained a concern at any site. On November 30, 2005, Interfax reported that Russian Orthodox Archbishop Nikon (Vasyukov) of Ufa and Sterlitamak asked Mayor Luzhkov not to allow the construction of the temple and used disrespectful language about the Hindu religion.

Rinchenling, a 200-strong community following the Dzogchen tradition within Tibetan Buddhism, lost its Moscow city center premises in 2004 due to a municipal construction project. Unlike the Hare Krishna community, city authorities did not offer them compensation, as there was no provision for it in their 1997 rental contract. In January 2005 Rinchenling also closed its Kunsangar retreat center in Moscow region. The group's Tibetan teacher, Chogyal Namkai Norbu, had told the group to sell the retreat center due to the negative influence of local Orthodox. Rinchenling was planning to set up a retreat center in Ukraine.

The Unification Church reported difficulties in establishing a Eurasian Church Center in Moscow to coordinate church activities in the region. On June 19, 2006, ORT-TV aired a sensational television program, *The Order of Moon: A Special Investigative Report*, where the Government appeared to be laying the groundwork for actions against the Church. This follows security services' actions against the founder of the Moscow congregation and legal and spiritual advisor, a U.S. citizen living in Moscow since 1990. On December 31, 2005, the main immigration office summoned him and gave him ten days to leave the country, banning his reapplication for five years. The FSB reportedly sent eight men to watch him during the remaining time, preventing him taking the actions necessary to remain in the country and escorting him onto the plane on January 9, 2006. The Church planned to construct the center on property owned by an NGO affiliated with the Reverend Moon. In April 2005 a local prosecutor ordered church officials to turn over for inspection documents relating to the property after the local administration received complaints from local citizens that a "totalitarian sect" was using the building. Eight police officers reportedly visited the property the next day in order to "investigate criminal activity."

According to Forum 18, in January 2006 the Evangelical Christian Missionary Union, which embraces fifty-four registered churches throughout the southern part of the country, reported that the municipal authorities in the town of Tikhoretsk (Krasnodar Kray) had refused to renew a rental contract with its congregation there. The 150-strong Path to God Church had rented its basement premises for the previous seven years and renovated them, according to the Union, but was unable to find alternative premises in the town and thus to meet as a single congregation.

Protestants in Voronezh and elsewhere often suspected local Orthodox clergy to be instrumental in blocking their construction plans. They cited as an example Saratov's construction committee's refusal to grant the Word of Life Pentecostal Church permission to advertise its presence on the outside wall of its own premises. In a letter dated May 4, 2005, chief architect Vladimir Virich confirmed as much, referring to an April 19, 2005, letter from the Saratov diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church and indicating that the Architectural Committee could not agree to the sign because of the letter.

State authorities gave Muslims meeting at Mosque Number 34 on the outskirts of Astrakhan until May 1, 2006, the option to demolish their worship building themselves or face its destruction, after the Astrakhan Oblast Court denied an April 17, 2006, appeal to suspend the demolition of the mosque for three months. At the end of the reporting period, the mosque remained standing. The congregation had already lost a previous March 1 Astrakhan Oblast Court appeal against a January 23, 2006, decision in which Astrakhan's Soviet District Court agreed with the municipal administration that authorities should remove the mosque--a disused silage tower and two-storey annex on the road to the city's airport--as it qualified as "unauthorized construction."

The mosque congregation purchased the 6,450 square-foot site in 1998, and Astrakhan authorities gave them permission to carry out the preliminary construction work of a new mosque building during the first half of 2001. However, the court noted that they did not start until almost four years later, and that the Muslim community's refurbishment and extension of the disused silage tower was not on the construction plan the city's architectural department approved. The court also ruled that they must remove the currently existing construction work for the new mosque, begun in 2005 after the community had collected sufficient funds.

Muslim sources were skeptical about the reasons given for the demolition order. Their situation abruptly changed, they claim, following a visit by President Putin to Astrakhan in August 2005, when he reportedly remarked to the regional governor and mayor that they had not chosen a good place for a mosque. When authorities denied them permission to hold a February 20 demonstration outside Astrakhan's municipal administration building, Muslim activists gathered more than 1,000 signatures protesting the demolition order. They intended to appeal to the supreme court, although it was not heard before the May 1 deadline. Per the Sova Center, a human rights NGO, the court ruling to demolish the mosque had not been executed as of June 30, 2006.

Citizens in Kaliningrad protested against the construction of a mosque, which the local Muslim community had been requesting since 1993. The ROC was involved in the talks to allow construction. While he claimed not to be against the mosque's construction, the local ROC bishop insisted that a small mosque rather than a large Muslim cultural

center should be built in the suburbs, proportional to the small number of Muslims living in Kaliningrad. The Sova Center reported that as of August 17, 2005, the Commission on Economic Policy and Municipal Property of the Kaliningrad City Council allowed the Kaliningrad Muslim organization to use several buildings free of charge. The Muslims planned to open a mosque there.

The NGO Sova Center reported at the end of the reporting period that the Vladimir Muslim community still was not able to obtain public land to build a mosque. In 2004, despite interference from the Vladimir city authorities, the congregation constructed a mosque on private land near a house that community members bought and used as a temporary prayer house. The mosque was called a community house and was used by the local community of Muslims even though it did not have room for all 25,000 members. The authorities had not met the request for a land spot for a mosque, but the negotiations were continuing.

The mayor's office continued to deny authorization to Muslims in the Krasnodar Kray to build a new mosque in the city of Sochi, even though the organization's current rented premises barely accommodated the approximately thirty members who attended Friday prayers. According to Sova, officials allotted land several times but did not authorize construction because of technical problems, or they ultimately sold the land to other people. According to the Krasnodar Kray Department for Relations with Public Associations and Religious Organizations and Monitoring of Migration Processes, authorities can allocate land for a mosque only after a public opinion survey indicates that the proposed location would not cause a "conflict situation."

Restitution of religious property seized by the Communist government remained an issue. Although authorities have returned many properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, all four traditional religions continued to pursue restitution cases.

The ROC appeared to have had greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups, although it still had disputed property claims. The ROC had a number of restitution claims in Yekaterinburg. According to the ROC diocese spokesman, the ROC does not lay claim to the 1905 Square but it would like to see the Orthodox cathedral that once stood there rebuilt. The issue was not discussed because the ROC understood how complicated and costly it would be to pull down the existing structures to make room for a cathedral.

Property claims are a complicated subject, according to the ROC spokesman, since there was no separation between church and state before the revolution. Most of the Orthodox church buildings in Sverdlovsk Oblast that were returned to the ROC were not considered ROC property; the ROC had no property rights to them and is only entitled to use these buildings, so that, at least theoretically, it could be evicted. The ROC fully owned only newly built churches.

In fact, the very historical importance of a building can impede its return to previous owners, as the Government views many prerevolutionary buildings as cultural treasures and runs them as museums, such as the Kremlin cathedrals, St. Petersburg's Peter and Paul Cathedral, and most of Novgorod's medieval churches. Since 1995 the Ministry of Culture has determined which historical and cultural monuments religious organizations must share with the state.

The Moscow City Duma passed a law in March 2004 returning approximately \$27,500 (approximately 742,500 rubles) to the ROC as retroactive property tax benefits.

Forum 18 reported that an Old Believer community in Samara was still struggling to obtain restitution of a prerevolutionary church. Municipal officials told the community that it should first ascertain the position of the ROC on restitution. In April 2006, for the first time in seventy-five years, the community celebrated Easter in the church, even though the municipality had not yet officially returned the church to the community.

The Roman Catholic Community reported forty-four disputed properties, most of which they would use for religious services. The Catholic Church was not successful in achieving restitution of the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral in Moscow. The office of an oil company occupied the cathedral, and the Catholic parish met in a former disco hall because it did not expect the company to vacate the premises. According to the Catholic Church, it was making progress towards building a new church in Moscow to replace the Saint Peter and Saint Paul Cathedral. In Vologda, Catholic authorities had not succeeded in--and did not anticipate--achieving restitution of a prerevolutionary church that housed a restaurant. In 2005 the local authorities in Tula returned a building to the local Catholic parish.

According to a March 2004 statement from the Council of Muslim Religious Organizations in Stavropol City, the region's arbitration court finally refused to hear a case set to decide the issue of whether or not federal authorities could require Stavropol authorities to return a mosque that had been converted to a city art gallery back to the Muslim community--after seven months of preliminary deliberations--on the grounds that it was "outside its competency." The fact that authorities lack of action forced the local Muslim community to file suit with the court in the first place, explains the statement, because the Stavropol Kray authorities repeatedly refused to acknowledge receipt of a 1999 instruction from the federal Ministries of Culture and State Property demanding the return of the former mosque to local Muslims.

Muslims in Beslan have appealed to the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations to return an historic mosque to the Muslim community. The Cathedral Mosque, built in 1906 by the decree of Tsar Nicholas II, was

occupied by a vodka-bottling plant and a bottle washing shop, and was soon to be modified to accommodate a car wash. The North Ossetian administration alleged that there was nowhere to move the plant, but the republic's Muslim Council stated that locating a factory in a mosque was illegal and that there were several facilities in the town to accommodate the factory.

The Jewish community was still seeking the return of a number of synagogues and cultural and religious artifacts. The FJC reported that federal officials had been cooperative in the community's efforts to seek restitution of former synagogues, as had some regional officials, although some Jews asserted that the Russian Federation has returned only a small portion of the total properties the Soviets confiscated under Soviet rule. In December 2004 the mayor of Sochi gave the Jewish community a parcel of land on which to construct a synagogue and community center to replace the small structure in use. According to the chief rabbi of Sochi Arye Edelcopf, the community was collecting money for the construction of the synagogue which was to begin within a few months. Chabad Lubavitch still sought return of the Schneerson Collection, revered religious books and documents of the Lubavitcher rebbes.

Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities. In Arkhangelsk, Jehovah's Witnesses originally signed a contract to use premises, from August 5-7, 2005, belonging to the Rossiya Physical Education and Sports Trade Union Society for a large congress, but received notice from the society's director three days before the congress was to take place that the building would not be available due to an incomplete sewage system. Failing to win an arbitration court challenge to this unilateral cancellation of the contract, the Jehovah's Witnesses then signed two further contracts with smaller venues, but the director of one cancelled the agreement later the same day.

On August 3, 2005, two days before the Jehovah's Witnesses' congress, Arkhangelsk-based weekly newspaper Pravda Severo-Zapada ran an article detailing last year's court ban on the Moscow community of Jehovah's Witnesses and likening the organization to Aum Sinrikyo, the Japanese religious group convicted of releasing nerve gas into Tokyo's underground system in 1995. The newspaper labeled the ideology totalitarian and called for an investigation by the FSB.

When the Jehovah's Witnesses' congress commenced on August 5, 2005 at the third venue, the Solombala Arts Center, the police demanded that all 714 delegates leave the building because of an alleged terrorist threat. Subsequently, a fire inspector drew up an official order closing the building. As a result, the Witnesses reduced the three-day program to a partial one-day session held on August 5, 2005. Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint with the prosecutor's office to open a criminal case against those responsible for the breakup of the convention; however, the prosecutor's office dismissed the complaint.

Officials also significantly disrupted two other Jehovah's Witnesses' regional congresses during the reporting period in the southern Urals city of Orenburg, where a conference was scheduled for August 12-14, 2005 and in Kokhma (Ivanovo region) for a July 22-24, 2005 congress in Rekord Stadium.

A Jehovah's Witnesses' convention planned for July 8-10, 2005 in Yekaterinburg with the participation of more than 5,000 Witnesses did not take place because of the reported July 4, 2005 intervention of an Orthodox priest who wrote a letter to the owner of the stadium demanding that the convention not proceed. On July 7 the director of the stadium claimed repair work should proceed instead and canceled the contract. Jehovah's Witnesses attempted to resolve the crisis by contacting officials, including filing a claim with the Yekaterinburg Prosecutor's Office to initiate a criminal case against the priest for disrupting the lawful activity of a religious organization. On August 31, Jehovah's Witnesses sent an inquiry on the results of the investigation to the prosecutor's office, which on September 14, 2005, replied that the investigation was still ongoing. Nevertheless, the Witnesses' Easter observances in Yekaterinburg on April 12, 2006, proceeded without official or community disruption for the first time in many years.

The Church of Scientology reported that it sometimes had difficulties getting permits for large events in Moscow.

The Caucasian Knot website reported in March 2006 that law enforcement officials in Kabardino-Balkaria continued to monitor children in schools who displayed observant Muslim customs, after the phrase "Jihad is freedom" appeared on the wall in a Nalchik school. Reportedly they kept lists of students who said Muslim prayers, had Muslim middle names, or who sent clips with Islamic themes through their mobile phones.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On October 13, 2005, following ROAC complaints about the awarding of St. Olga's Church to the ROC, three armed men broke into the home of Metropolitan Valentine of Suzdal and Vladimir, the head of the ROAC. The attack was obviously well planned and timed to take advantage of a short period when he was alone. The attackers knocked him unconscious and beat him severely, particularly on his feet, from which they removed the bandages to inflict more harm because of his diabetic condition. The men rolled him up in a rug to be carried out of the house, but the unexpected arrival of another cleric surprised the attackers and they dropped the Metropolitan. He spent six months in the hospital recovering from injuries sustained and the amputation of part of his foot. The FSB reportedly interrogated and threatened several ROAC clergy and members following this incident.

In April 2005, a group of masked paramilitary troops stormed the Work of Faith Church in Izhevsk, Udmurtia, during an evening worship service, led worshippers outside and searched them without a search warrant; the troops threatened some of the women with rape and detained forty-six persons some for as long as twenty four hours. In response to several complaints (and international attention), local authorities conducted an investigation of the Izhevsk incident. They said their investigation uncovered that the police had committed some procedural irregularities while the detainees were in custody, that officials had given a warning to the district police chief because of the irregularities, had reprimanded two other police officials, and opened a criminal investigation into the allegation that the police beat one of the detainees. Officials dropped administrative charges against most, if not all, of the detainees.

On the evening of April 12, 2006, the Lyublino Police Department of Moscow disrupted a religious meeting of Jehovah's Witnesses. The commemoration of the death of Christ, also known as the Lord's Evening Meal, is the most important religious observance for Jehovah's Witnesses. The chief of the Lyublino Police Department, Yevgeniy Kulikov, ordered the congregation to disperse. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, police detained fourteen male leaders of the congregation, taking their passports. Armed officers of the Special Police Forces (OMON) took them to the Lyublino police station where police interrogated them for up to four hours before releasing them at one-thirty a.m. Police refused to provide them with written reasons for their detention and reportedly not only physically assaulted their attorney when he went to the police station to assist them but also threatened him at knife-point not to file a complaint. Both the police and Jehovah's Witnesses filed complaints with the prosecutor's office. The Jehovah's Witnesses also filed a court action, and officials set the hearing for May 2006. After several adjournments, on June 15, 2006, the judge finally ruled that the detention of the plaintiffs was unlawful, but dismissed the remainder of the claim, failing to find unlawful the fact that police had disrupted the religious service. The decision referred to the absence of the permission of the authorities to carry out the meeting, in accordance with the Federal Law on Assemblies, Rallies, Processions, Demonstrations, and Pickets. Jehovah's Witnesses filed an appeal on June 30 with the Moscow City Court because the law does not apply to religious groups or associations. Of the 23 different locations in Moscow used by some 17,000 of Jehovah's Witnesses to commemorate the death of Christ, the Lyublino District was the only place where the observance was disrupted by police intervention. Similar services were held throughout the country without interference. In 2005 the total number who attended services was approximately 267,000.

In early April 2006 persons repeatedly vandalized the Kingdom Hall and its surrounding property in Kamyshin in the Volgograd region. Police did not take any action, saying that the acts did not constitute a crime. In November 2005, unidentified persons fired thirty shots into the Jehovah's Witnesses Kingdom Hall in Voskresensk, but hit no one. Police opened a criminal case but closed it on January 31, 2006, because they could not identify the perpetrators.

In August 2004, the Khabarovsk newspaper Amurskiy Meridian reported that in March of that year police in Khabarovsk detained and beat Sergey Sofrin, a local Jewish businessman, repeatedly insulting him with religious epithets. At the end of the reporting period, contacts at the newspaper reported that although officials conducted an investigation of the incident, they had not disciplined the police involved yet.

Authorities periodically arrested suspected members of the banned Islamic political movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), on the grounds that they conducted extremist and terrorist activities. In April 2006 a Moscow court convicted Sardorbek Siddikov and sentenced him to one year in jail for membership in HT. On September 8, 2005, the city court of Nizhnevartovsk, gave a four-year suspended prison term to Eduard Khusainov, who was believed to have headed the local HT group. Officials reportedly found extremist propaganda in his apartment. Khusainov was charged with organizing the activities of an extremist organization and with "involving others in committing terrorist crimes or otherwise abetting such crimes."

On October 3, 2005, the Tobolsk Court found nine members of the local HT branch guilty on all charges of extremism brought against them. Three of the accused--local leaders Marat Saybatalov, Dmitry Petrichenko, and Rail Valitov--were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five and one-half to six years. Other members were sentenced to various terms from twelve months to five and one-half years.

According to Sova, police broke up an HT group in Chelyabinsk in March 2005 and detained one of its members, Rinat Galiullin. The criminal case against Rinat Galiullin was initiated on March 15, 2005. He was arrested and tried in September-November 2005. The court passed a verdict of a one-year suspended sentence. Also, Galiullin won a suit against a local newspaper for spreading information alleging that he had been plotting a riot, stockpiled weapons, and encouraged people to sign a contract with Al Qaeda. The HT group, to which Galiullin allegedly belonged, was not found. Sova also reported that since December 2004, the authorities in Tatarstan initiated criminal cases on charges of extremism and terrorism against alleged members of radical organizations, including HT and Islamic Jamaat. According to Sova, the Islamic Jamaat case was being heard in court in Tatarstan. Authorities charged twenty-three persons. The preliminary investigation was over, and five young men were being tried in court. Later, a trial for other members will take place. Among the charges are murder and planning hostile activities. In the authorities' case against the seven alleged HT members, the investigation cleared one of them, but the other six remain untried. In May 2005 authorities also brought to trial for alleged HT membership the two individuals who police in Izhevsk detained in December 2004. In June 2005, they were convicted each to one year of parole. At the end of the reporting period, the courts had convicted forty-six Muslims, twenty-nine of whom were in prison, for membership in Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

On March 31, 2006, Adygeia militia reportedly detained Muslims on their way to Friday prayer at the mosque in the

nearby village of New Adygeia. According to news service IA Regnum, before the start of midday prayers, Special Forces of the Adygeia MVD blocked all entrances and exits to the village. The action was carried out by the local MVD office for fighting organized crime together with a group from the FSB. Muslims in Adygeia suspected that Special Forces had a list of Muslims planning to pray in this mosque that included their license plates. One resident reported that only Muslims were stopped in their vehicles by road blocks and apprehended; those who tried to leave their cars were intimidated, and none of them were able to attend prayer. Another source reported that Special Forces threatened to break the legs of those who tried to leave their cars and walk to the mosque.

In Dagestan in March 2006, journalists reported that soldiers desecrated a copy of the Qur'an while searching the house of a killed militant.

The NGO Memorial reported government harassment of Muslims in Adygeia starting in summer 2005. Hostile actions reported included seizing religious literature from citizens. In one example from December 29, 2005, authorities claimed that the seizure of six books from one young Muslim was connected to the proceedings against former imam of the Adygeia mosque Nedzhmedin Abazia for "propaganda on the inferiority of citizens signaled by their relations with Hinduism, Christianity, and non-Wahabbist forms of Islam." Authorities questioned approximately ten persons in Adygeia in connection with this case.

On October 22, 2005, in Maykop, Adygeia Republic, police officers allegedly assaulted and apprehended a group of young Muslims, including the Maykop mosque's imam, as they were leaving a mosque. The imam reported that masked policemen dragged the group to minibuses and took them to the Interior Ministry's Anti-Organized Crime Department, where policemen beat and questioned them about why there were wearing beards and observing Islamic norms of hygiene. After a night in prison, officials took them before a judge who ordered their immediate release.

On October 13, 2005, gunman attacked police and military facilities in Nalchik, the capital of the southern republic of Kabardino-Balkaria in the North Caucasus. The attack appeared to have been the result of a combination of pressure by local authorities on independent mosques (closure of thirty-nine of forty-six local mosques), rampant corruption, and attempts by Chechen separatists to expand their war against the Government. It was known that nearly all of the several hundred militants killed during the violence were young untrained Muslims protesting the local Ministry of Internal Affairs' closure of mosques. Government officials said they arrested more than sixty persons on suspicion of participating in the October raids on Nalchik. Human rights groups, in turn, claimed the number of detainees was higher and that most of them were not responsible for the unrest. Some sources believed that several hundred fighters were killed and that the authorities had not returned to families the corpses of these fighters.

Human rights groups claimed that following the 2004 hostage-taking in Beslan, police stepped up activity in the North Caucasus. Authorities allegedly have charged with extremism increasing numbers of Muslims, both Russian citizens and citizens of the predominately Muslim states bordering Russia. Memorial described twenty-three cases involving more than eighty individuals charged with extremism as "trumped-up." Of these, the NGO Memorial reported, eighteen resulted in verdicts, only one of which was an acquittal. Some observers said that police harassment of Muslim clerics and alleged militants in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkariya, including torture and the closure of all but one of Nalchik's mosques during the reporting period, were part of the reason for the October 13, 2005 rebel attack on Nalchik.

According to the Sova Center, on April 19, 2005, nine female students were arrested during their regular reading of the Qur'an in a classroom at Kabardino-Balkariya State University. Authorities told the students when arresting them that wearing the hijab and group studying of the Qur'an violated university statutes. Police brought them to Nalchik city militia headquarters, searched, interrogated, and detained them for about eight hours. The same source claimed that police had detained some Muslims in Moscow mosques prior to the March 2004 elections.

There were occasional reports of short-term police detentions of non-Muslim believers on religious grounds, but such incidents were generally resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained missionaries for brief periods throughout the country or asked them to cease their activities, such as displaying signboards, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing. During the reporting period, the Jehovah's Witnesses in particular reported approximately fifty-five recorded incidents, twenty-one of which took place in Moscow, in which authorities briefly detained their members or other citizens while conducting lawful preaching activities.

After months of demonstrations, arrests, court hearings, and time spent in jail in June 2005, Pastor Purshaga and members of Emmanuel Pentecostal Church in Moscow District won the right to rent land to use for a prayer house and church office building. At the end of the reporting period, authorities had not decided about another piece of land at issue.

In September 2004, an Initiativniki prayer house in Lyubuchany, Chekhov District, Moscow Oblast, burned down. In the summer preceding the fire, security agencies, including local police and FSB officers, intimidated several thousand participants at an open-air gathering sponsored by the church. Press reports claimed that eyewitnesses placed some of the same law enforcement personnel at the church site in September minutes before the fire broke out. Although the official investigation attributed the fire to arson, authorities had charged no one in the incident by the end of the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country; however, there were increasing NGO reports of short-term detentions, especially in the North Caucasus.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Anti-Semitic Acts

Explicit, racially motivated violent attacks against Jews were fairly rare in the context of rapidly growing racist violence in the country, especially perpetrated by skinheads targeting identifiable ethnic groups. There were a series of attacks around a Moscow synagogue in Maryina Roscha in the winter of 2004-05. In particular, the attackers beat Rabbi Alexander Lakshin. Following the attack against the rabbi, police promptly found the perpetrators; they were prosecuted and convicted, and attacks against Jews in the neighborhood stopped. There were three known explicit anti-Semitic violent attacks and four incidents of public insults and threats in 2005, which was down from 2004.

A notable exception was on January 11, 2006, in Moscow, when twenty-year-old Alexander Koptsev attacked worshippers in the Chabad synagogue with a knife, wounding eight people--among them citizens of Russia, Israel, Tajikistan, and the United States. On March 27, 2006, the Moscow City Court sentenced Koptsev to thirteen years' imprisonment, ordering him to undergo mandatory psychiatric treatment. The court dropped the charges of provoking interethnic hatred but left the charge of attempted murder of two or more persons for reasons of ethnic enmity. The lawyers of the victims filed an appeal since the prosecutor had dropped the charges of inciting ethnic hate; Koptsev's lawyers also filed an appeal due to his mental illness and the fact that none of the victims were killed or disabled. On June 20, 2006, the Supreme Court overturned the verdict on the grounds that the charges had not referred to the incitement of racial and religious hatred and ordered a new trial in a different court. Both President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov publicly condemned this attack.

On January 13, 2006, a local student made a copy-cat attack on a synagogue in Rostov-on-Don. He entered the synagogue attempting to attack worshippers, but security guards stopped him before he could harm anyone. Although authorities charged him with hooliganism, the court declared him mentally unfit to stand trial. On June 9, 2006, a court in Rostov-on-Don ruled that he undergo psychiatric treatment.

According to the NGO Moscow Bureau of Human Rights (MBHR), the ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity (RNE) paramilitary organization continued to propagate hostility toward Jews and non-Orthodox Christians. The RNE appeared to have lost political influence in some regions since its peak in 1998, but the organization maintained high levels of activity in other regions, such as Voronezh. Sova Center noted in its 2005 report that RNE activities had been mostly reduced to picketing and distributing leaflets.

On November 6, 2005, Basmannyy District Court of Moscow convicted an RNE activist for propaganda and public demonstration of Nazi attributes and symbols and sentenced him to five days of detention under the Administrative Code. Officials detained the activist on November 4, 2005 among twelve RNE members who participated in a so-called "Right March."

According to an FJC report published in June 2005, a court in Velikiy Novgorod convicted three RNE members of inciting ethnic and religious hatred, and sentenced the leader of the RNE cell to four years in prison, and two others to two and three years. According to the Sova Center, in April 2005, authorities convicted two RNE members from Bryansk Oblast and gave them suspended sentences on charges of inciting racial hatred after distributing RNE leaflets and videos in Orel. After authorities announced the verdict, RNE activities in Orel noticeably intensified, and over thirty RNE members held a picket the day the verdict was announced, with RNE members from Bryansk, Moscow Region, and Belgorod coming to support their "comrades." On May 8, 2005 three RNE members distributed nationalistic leaflets in downtown Orel.

In October 2005 the MOJ registered the interregional social movement National Sovereign Way of Russia (NDPR). The organization is the successor of the National Sovereign Party of Russia (which has not been able to register as a political party) and preserved its abbreviation NDPR as well as the party's anti-Semitic, nationalistic ideology. In 2005 officials denied the St. Petersburg branch registration, although the organization tried to get registration based on the same documents as the Moscow branch.

Some NDPR branches in regions participated in official events that the local authorities organized. For instance, NDPR participated in a May 1, 2006 communist meeting in Moscow. NDPR also participated in May 1, 2006 events in St. Petersburg. In the summer of 2005, in St. Petersburg, NDPR participated in the events of the local legislative assembly twice. On July 19, 2005, the Altay NDPR branch participated in a rally of local trade unions and distributed its leaflets, although local authorities in attendance tried to halt it; local TV broadcast the event. At a small February 2005 rally in Moscow, NDPR members distributed anti-Semitic publications and engaged in anti-Semitic hate speech, and in 2004, activists distributed their newspaper and leaflets in downtown Kostroma.

The primary targets of skinheads were foreigners and individuals from the North Caucasus, but they expressed anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments as well.

The MBHR estimated more than 50,000 skinheads and 15,000 members of extremist organizations were acting in the country, who engage in approximately 300 incidents on ethnic hate grounds take place annually. However, in recent years there were at most only five indictments annually. MBHR reported that during the period from January to May 2006, officials registered over 100 skinhead attacks, killing 17 people and injuring approximately 130. No statistics on the number of skinheads in particular towns was available, but according to MBHR, among the cities where skinheads were especially active in 2006, were Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kostroma, Volzhsk, Voronezh Oblast, Tula Oblast, Cheboksary, Vladivostok, Yekaterinburg, Krasnoyarsk, Elista, Kaluga, Nizhniy Novgorod, Petrozavodsk, Ryazan, and Surgut. Authorities combined thirteen criminal cases of ethnic-extremist motivation that took place in St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast from 2003-2006 into one case for trial. MBHR noted that the skinhead movement continues to expand, spreading from major regional centers to small towns and settlements. In December 2005 skinheads appeared in the small settlement of Chagoda, Vologda region.

In connection with the April 2004 attack in Voronezh on human rights activist and anti-Semitism monitor Aleksey Kozlov, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that authorities arrested two young skinheads shortly thereafter and treated the attack as a misdemeanor unworthy of prosecution and closed the case.

At least two demonstrations took place in Moscow on February 23, 2006, the Defenders of the Fatherland holiday. Participants displayed racist placards with slogans such as "Russia for ethnic Russians" and chanted racist slogans. According to reports, prominent members and leaders of the Rodina and Communist political parties participated in one of the demonstrations. Authorities gave administrative sanctions (fines and up to five days' administrative arrest for carrying a flag with a swastika) to the organizers of the march and a few participants belonging to RNE; officials did not charge anyone with incitement to racial hatred under Article 282 of the Criminal Code in connection with the march. In response to an appeal by the Moscow Anti-Fascist Center NGO, a court ruled on April 11, 2006, that the organizers had not violated any criminal laws.

On November 4, 2005, the Day of National Unity, in Moscow, the Movement against Illegal Immigration and other organizations organized a march of approximately one thousand persons, with openly racist slogans against migrants and Jews, entitled "Russia against the Occupiers."

Vandals desecrated Jewish cemeteries during the reporting period. Officials reported desecration in Omsk (April 15, 2006), the settlement of Khokhryaki near Izhevsk (November 2005), and Kostroma (October 2005). On October 16, 2005, vandals toppled and broke at least fifty tombstones, and on October 6, 2005, vandals desecrated approximately seventy Jewish graves in St. Petersburg. Vandals also desecrated graves in Velikiye Luki (September 20, 2005), Tambov (August 29 and August 31, 2005), and Tver (August 6, 2005). Earlier in 2005, vandals desecrated Jewish cemeteries in Kazan, Moscow, Saratov, Petrozavodsk, Makhachkala, Irkutsk, and St. Petersburg. In late May 2005, vandals painted swastikas on twenty-six Jewish tombstones in the Jewish section of Kazan's Arskoye Cemetery. The FJC reported that the authorities were investigating the incident as a hate crime and the Kazan City Council issued a statement condemning the attack. In May 2005 vandals desecrated Jewish graves at the Vostryakovskoye Cemetery, near Moscow; the case was being treated as a hate crime rather than simple "hooliganism." The Jewish cemetery in Petrozavodsk was vandalized at least three times in 2004; a criminal investigation failed to identify the perpetrators.

One of the most large-scale desecrations occurred in St. Petersburg in December 2004, when vandals damaged approximately one-hundred graves at the St. Petersburg Preobrazhenskoye (Jewish) Cemetery. In the aftermath of the desecration, St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko met with the city's Chief Rabbi Menachem-Mendel Pewsner, and promised a serious investigation of the crime. Officials arrested members of a gang but reportedly, since its members were minors, the case was either dropped or the perpetrators received insignificant punishment.

Sometimes authorities prosecuted the perpetrators as in January 2005, when a court in Velikiy Novgorod issued a three-year prison term for planting a fake explosive device near the city's synagogue in 2003, and when authorities sentenced two adults and one minor to two years' probation for a 2004 desecration in Kaluga Kray.

Vandals desecrated several synagogues and Jewish community centers during the reporting period. In June 2006, officials reported that a man entered a Jewish cultural center in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, and stabbed the door of the synagogue ten times with a knife. Security guards caught him and had police arrest him. According to a report from the UCSJ, a May 18, 2006, article in the local newspaper "Saratovskaya Oblastnaya Gazeta" reported that the courts sentenced a 20-year-old man with a two-year suspended sentence for painting swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans on the walls of the Saratov Jewish center to which he had confessed when police caught him doing the same thing to a parked car. Unknown assailants have also thrown rocks at the center and its occupants through the windows. Local police allegedly ignored the Jewish community's complaints until the swastika-painting incident.

In April 2006, at the Orenburg synagogue, a group of young men threw stones, kicked the synagogue doors, shouted anti-Semitic slogans, and hit windows with a metal bar. Police detained a fifteen-year-old boy near the synagogue, while others escaped. Officials opened criminal proceedings on charges of hooliganism, not extremism, but since the boy was a minor, he could not face criminal punishment. In March 2006 vandals used paint to draw a swastika on the fence in front of the main entrance of the Jewish community center and the region's first synagogue under construction

in Lipetsk. Vandals painted anti-Semitic insults and swastikas on the walls of synagogues in Borovichy (October 5, 2005) and Nizhniy Novgorod (September 5, 2005) similar to incidents in Vladimir (June 3, 2005).

In March 2006 a youth again vandalized the Jewish center in Penza, breaking one of its windows with a brick. Vandals had attacked this building and the Jewish center in Taganrog on a number of previous occasions in 2005 and 2004. In October 2004, congregants stopped a group of skinheads from entering the synagogue in Penza. Later that day, approximately forty people armed with chains and iron clubs approached the synagogue. Worshipers locked themselves inside and called the police who detained two or three of the perpetrators and forced them to repair the damage.

These incidents are similar to those reported for earlier reporting periods in Samara, Syktyvkar (Komi Republic), Petrozavodsk (Republic of Karelia) in March 2005 and Perovo, Moscow Oblast, in February 2005; in 2004 in Baltiisk, Kaliningrad Oblast, and in the city of Kaliningrad. In November 2004, on the anniversary of Kristallnacht, unknown individuals scrawled anti-Semitic graffiti on the headquarters of the Moscow-based "Holocaust Foundation."

In May 2005 a fire which authorities considered a case of arson destroyed the historic synagogue of Malakhovka in the outskirts of Moscow. Several days earlier, there had been a burglary at the synagogue. The FJC reported that officials suspected the same persons of both crimes and raised the possibility that they may have set the synagogue fire to destroy evidence related to the burglary, rather than as a hate crime. Authorities detained the main suspect, Andrei Terekhov, on May 14 after he broke into a Christian church in Malakhovka. On December 5, 2005, the trial started; the court ultimately convicted him of setting the fire in order to cover evidence of his robbery and sentenced him to five years in prison and a fine. The Malakhovka Jewish community was preparing to build a community center and a new synagogue at the same location. While the court required Terekhov to compensate for the arson, it was unlikely that he would be able to make any financial contribution.

The Jewish community center in the Moscow suburb of Saltykovka was hit by arson in January and February 2005. Investigators caught the man who set the arson fire; he denied being an anti-Semite and said that he could not explain his motivation for the arson. The prosecutors found no criminal substance in his actions and closed the case. Vandals desecrated the synagogue in the Perovo district of Moscow in January 2005 and again in February 2005.

Authorities arrested two students for posting Nazi posters in Petrozavodsk in April 2005, on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday. Reports indicate that the court punished them in accordance with the administrative code.

There were no developments in the 2004 cases of the beating of Ulyanovsk Jewish youth leader Aleksandr Golynsky and the skinhead vandalism of the Ulyanovsk Jewish Center. The FJC reported that the police released the suspects that community members had detained and delivered to them. There also were no developments in connection with the 2004 attack on the synagogue in Chelyabinsk.

A number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers that print anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic articles, many of which appear to violate the law against extremism, were readily available throughout the country. Although the production of this illegal material continued, authorities generally did not prosecute the publishers, although there were some noted recent exceptions described below. The estimated number of xenophobic publications exceeded one hundred; local chapters of the NDPR sponsored many of them. The larger anti-Semitic publications, such as *Russkaya Pravda*, *Vityaz*, and *Peresvet*, were easily available in many Moscow metro stations. Some NGOs claimed that the same local authorities that refused to take action against offenders owned or managed many of these publications. In addition, there were at least eighty websites in the country dedicated to distributing anti-Semitic propaganda.

On April, 4, 2006, St. Petersburg prosecutor Sergey Zaitsev rescinded the decision of his deputy, Alexandr Korsunov, who refused to prosecute the *Rus Pravoslanaya* (Orthodox Russia) editor Konstantin Dushenov for the publication of anti-Semitic materials. Although Korsunov found no criminal matter in Dushenov's publications, Zaitsev expressed a different position after the public criticized his deputy's decision.

On April 3, 2006, the Velikiy Novgorod (Central Russia) Prosecutor's Office initiated a criminal case against the Russian *Veche* editor Paul Ivanov. Ivanov was accused of "public calls to committing violence" and "fueling hatred and discord." Officials initiated the case after the staff of the St. Petersburg History Institute of the Academy of Sciences had examined several issues of the newspaper and found that they contained elements that could incite hatred.

According to the ADL, in March 2006 officials initiated a criminal case in Ulyanovsk against the publishers of the *Vest* newspaper for anti-Semitic articles. On February 2, 2006, the Moscow Procurator's Office initiated a criminal case over the distribution of anti-Semitic literature on the Internet, because this material had motivated Alexander Koptsev, who had attacked parishioners at the Bolshaya Bronnaya synagogue in January 2006. However, according to the ADL, the case might not prevent the future Internet distribution of anti-Semitic literature, because many extremist websites are registered abroad.

According to the Russian Jewish Congress, the Chita Russian Zabaikalie newspaper published anti-Semitic articles in February 2006. There were reports of anti-Semitic literature on sale in Saratov, Kaliningrad, Petrozavodsk, Rostov-on-Don, and other cities. The *Our Strategy* television program, which had broadcast anti-Semitic views, continued to air in

St. Petersburg during the reporting period.

On January 11, 2006, the Tula newspaper Zasechniy Rubezh, named after its nationalist organization publisher, printed an interview with scholar I. Shafarevitch in which he stated he approved of the anti-Semitic "letter of 500." The letter, issued in January 2005, was signed by twenty Duma deputies. At the time, the newspapers Rus Pravoslavnyaya and Za Russkoye Delo published articles supporting the letter.

On January 5, 2006, the Nizhniy Novgorod newspaper, Novoye Delo, printed an article which described the Khazars' adoption of Judaism more than 1,000 years ago in anti-Semitic terms and accused Jews of enslaving the Khazars, saying that the Jews turned Khazaria into a "blood-sucking spider that exhausted the neighboring countries."

In April 2005 Velikolukskaya Pravda, a newspaper supported by the authorities in Velikiy Luki in Pskov Oblast, published an anti-Semitic article which the local prosecutor began investigating as a possible hate crime. Per Sova Center, based on the fact of the publication of the article, Velikiye Luki City Procuracy initiated a criminal case for instigation of national hatred on June 1, 2005. On November 24, 2005, the City Procuracy dropped the case on the grounds of absence of crime in the action.

According to local representatives of the ADL, a St. Petersburg prosecutor initiated criminal proceedings against the publisher of the Our Fatherland newspaper, accusing it of hate speech in 2005. Officials gave the newspaper a warning, but there was no information on further proceedings.

The Ulyanovsk local newspaper Orthodox Simbirsk is still in circulation despite authorities holding preliminary hearings in January 2005 following a criminal case against the editor in 2002 for demonizing Jews. The FJC reported that the newspaper fired the editor, and in March 2005 Governor Morozov of Ulyanovsk promised governmental financial support to prevent bankruptcy.

In December 2004, a court in Novosibirsk sentenced the editor of Russkaya Sibir, Igor Kolodezenko, to a two and half year suspended sentence for publishing anti-Semitic articles. Kolodezenko, whom the court convicted of inciting ethnic hatred in 2000, never served prison time because of a Duma commemorative amnesty.

In 2005 Volgograd's Voroshilovskiy District Prosecutor's Office decided not to pursue a criminal case against the editor of the newspaper Kolokol, accused of inciting ethnic hatred through a series of anti-Semitic articles. The MBHR and the Volgograd Jewish community had sought such a case, the latter appealing for action on numerous occasions, without result. The prosecutor reportedly found the statute of limitations applied to one of the offending articles and that the others did not meet sufficient cause of action under the hate crime laws.

An anti-Semitic novel, The Nameless Beast, by Yevgeny Chebalin, had been on sale in the State Duma's bookstore since September 2003, despite international publicity. The xenophobic and anti-Semitic text makes offensive comparisons of Jews and non-Russians. According to the ADL, authorities do not typically monitor for content books sold in the Duma. In cases where Jewish or other public organizations have attempted to take legal action against the publishers, the courts have been generally unwilling to recognize the presence of anti-Semitic content.

Anti-Semitic statements have resulted in formal prosecution, but while the Government has publicly denounced nationalist ideology and supports legal action against anti-Semitic acts, the reluctance of some lower-level officials to call such acts anything other than "hooliganism" remained problematic. According to the ADL, in 2006 human rights organizations made numerous attempts to prosecute the authors of the "Letter of 500." However, their attempts were unsuccessful. According to the Obschestvennoye Mnenie (Public Opinion) Foundation, after the January 2006 Moscow synagogue attack, the number of citizens who condemned anti-Semitism increased by almost 10 percent. A poll concerning the attack showed that the proportion of citizens who had a negative attitude towards anti-Semites increased from 34 to 42 percent, while the proportion of those who claimed to be indifferent to them decreased from 47 to 38 percent. Distrust and dislike of Jews was expressed by 7 percent of the respondents, while 5 percent sympathized with those who expressed dislike.

In January 2006, the Nizhniy Novgorod Muslim Council condemned Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's appeal to rid the world of Israel in an aggressive call for another Holocaust. The council issued a statement on International Holocaust Remembrance Day urging citizens to overcome anti-Semitism, extremism and xenophobia.

On June 8, 2005, Patriarch Aleksey II sent a statement to the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance meeting in Cordoba, Spain, in which, reportedly for the first time, he publicly referred to anti-Semitism as a "sin."

Members of the State Duma and other prominent figures expressed anti-Semitic sentiments. In January 2005, approximately 500 persons, including nineteen members of the Duma representing the Rodina Party and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), wrote to the prosecutor general to investigate Jewish organizations and initiate proceedings to ban them, charging that a Russian translation of ancient Jewish law, the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh, incited hatred against non-Jews. The MFA condemned the letter as did President Putin, and

the Duma passed a resolution condemning the letter in February 2005. In response, approximately 5,000 persons, reportedly including a number of ROC clerics and some prominent cultural figures, signed a similar anti-Semitic letter to the prosecutor general in March 2005. A Moscow district prosecutor opened an investigation into the Jewish organization that published the translation, as well as into charges brought by Jewish and human rights organizations that the letters violated federal laws against ethnic incitement, but closed both investigations in June 2005 without bringing charges. In January 2006, some of the deputies who had signed the letter said in an interview that the letter had been the "right step." One deputy even proposed at a Rodina meeting to repeat the letter with even wider distribution. Originally registered with well-known neo-Nazis on its electoral lists, Rodina attempted to improve its image by rejecting openly neo-Nazi candidates; however, it allowed others known for their anti-Semitic views to remain. On November 21, 2005, head of the Rodina party Dmitry Rogozin, in a meeting with Rabbi Lazar, claimed that neither he nor anyone around him from the party were anti-Semites. He claimed that although a number of members of the Rodina Duma faction did sign the "letter of 500," it included deputies who were not members of the party and therefore did not follow party discipline.

State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) are also known for their anti-Semitic rhetoric and statements. In earlier years, LDPR supporters rallied during Moscow's May Day celebration, carrying anti-Semitic signs and speaking out against what they called "world Zionism," but there were no reports of this during the period covered by this report. Nikolay Kurianovich, an LDPR Duma deputy, initiated and publicized the creation of a "list of the enemies of the Russian people," with mostly Jewish names on the list.

Some members of the KPRF also made anti-Semitic statements. For example, former Krasnodar Kray governor and current State Duma deputy Nikolay Kondratenko at a June/July 2004 conference in Beirut, blamed Zionism and Jews in general for many of the country's problems and blamed Jews for helping to destroy the Soviet Union. His speech was printed in the Communist Party's main newspaper Sovetskaya Rossiya and several regional papers, including the Krasnodar paper Kuban Segodnya and the Volgograd paper Volgogradskaya Tribuna.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In June 2006 the administration of Arsen Kanokov, president of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic (KBR), drafted a new three-year program to implement measures to protect human rights. The document assesses the work of republic and local government officials and of the Interior Ministry, which under its former head, Khachim Shogenov, reportedly targeted young Muslim men in a misdirected attempt to curb militant Islam.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice reported as of June 20, 2006 that the Land Committee of the Western District of Moscow officially allowed the Emmanuel Church to rent 4,000 square meters of land under the old House of Culture in the Solntsevo district of Moscow, which members planned to convert into a prayer house and church office building. As for the piece of land on Prospekt Verndaskoyo (Moscow Western District), authorities had not decided. This decision came after a Moscow district court ruled on November 14, 2005, that it agreed with the Emmanuel Pentecostal Church that the local authorities had violated the legal procedure for regulating public events in its handling of the Church's repeated demonstrations. The same court ruled on October 10, 2005, that thirteen police had wrongfully detained Emmanuel members following a demonstration a week earlier. Pastor Purshaga confirmed that his church--which had been staging regular demonstrations for over eight months--and protesting since 1996 discrimination that prevented them from building a Pentecostal Church, stopped encountering police obstruction following these court decisions. During their long fight, authorities arrested members and Pastor Purshaga on several occasions. They served five days in jail in June 2005.

In Voronezh the regional administration organized a roundtable meeting in November 2005 at which representatives from the police, the procuracy, the Federal Security Services, local authorities, universities, NGOs, academics, and religious groups discussed the problems of racism, intolerance, and interethnic relations. Following the meeting, officials set up a coordination committee chaired by the deputy governor of Voronezh region, bringing together law enforcement agencies, representatives from the town's universities, NGOs, and religious institutions with the aim of creating a plan of action.

Izvestiya reported that on May 17, 2005, the Moscow city government decided to create a two-year, \$12.5 million (350 million ruble) program to promote interethnic tolerance.

Federal and regional officials participated actively in, and in many cases strongly supported, a range of NGO-organized programs to promote tolerance and the more effective handling of hate crimes.

In addition, the newly established Public Chamber, a body that the government set up to represent civil society and whose approach President Putin appeared largely to direct, recognized racism and intolerance as a serious issue and a priority on which to work. The Public Chamber set up a commission on tolerance and freedom of conscience.

In the past five years, the number of organized Jewish communities in the country has increased from 87 to more than 200. In 2005 officials dedicated new synagogues in Birobidzhan (Jewish Autonomous Oblast), Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg; and opened a Jewish school in Kazan.

The reporting period witnessed a few developments in the cultural life of the Jewish community such as opening of a new building to house a Jewish Community Center in St. Petersburg in September 2005. The Federation of Jewish Communities, which officially accounts for 184 communities in 176 cities of the country, was restoring a synagogue in Irkutsk. The project was to be completed in the summer of 2006. As of early 2006, the FJC had built eleven multifunctional community centers in the country. A Jewish center and synagogue are being constructed in Lipetsk, and the construction was expected to be completed in the fall of 2006.

The support of federal authorities, and in many cases regional and local authorities, facilitated the establishment of new Jewish institutions. On June 26, 2006, Arkadiy Gaydamak President of the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations of Russia, and Chief Rabbi of Russia Shayeveich signed an investment contract regarding the construction of a Moscow Jewish community center. Work began on the construction of a \$100 million (2 billion, 700 million rubles) complex on land donated by the Moscow city government to house Jewish community institutions including a school, a hospital, and a major new museum devoted to the history of the country's Jews, the Holocaust, and tolerance. The construction was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2008.

On September 1, 2005, a center for scribing sacred Jewish scrolls opened in St. Petersburg for the first time in eighty years. Located in the Jewish educational center Tomhei Tmimim Lubavich Yeshivah, the center named "Merkaz Stam" will train specialists in scribing and verifying Torah scrolls, Tefillins, and Mezuzahs for use by the Jewish population in the city. A certified specialist from Israel directed the center.

See Anti-Semitic Acts section for reports of positive developments on closing of anti-Semitic newspapers, public opinion about anti-Semites, and condemnation of Iranian President Ahmadinejad.

Some minority groups were able to obtain restitution of their religious property. Press reports in August 2005 indicated that officials returned a church that Soviet authorities had confiscated in 1922 to a St. Petersburg Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Community. On September 5, 2005, authorities returned school buildings in Rostov-on-Don and Orenburg to the Jewish community, and in September 2004, they returned a synagogue in Vladivostok. In 2004, Tula City Duma returned a church to the Catholic community. On September 18, 2005 the Roman Catholic Church consecrated its new church in Pskov after many delays apparently due to ROC pressure.

Jehovah's Witnesses reported that authorities resolved a child custody case in their favor during the reporting period.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Religious matters are not a source of pronounced societal tension or overt discrimination for most citizens; however, many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the ROC is a part of Russian culture. Instances of terrorism and events related to the war in Chechnya have given rise to negative popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups in many regions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continued, although it was often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices are the primary motivation. Conservative activists claiming ties to the ROC disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other minority religions, and some ROC leaders expressed similar views. See the Anti-Semitic Acts section for additional information on this subject.

There is no large-scale movement to promote interfaith dialogue; however, some religious groups successfully collaborate on the local level on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialogues. Pentecostal and Baptist organizations, as well as the ROC, have been reluctant to support ecumenism. At the international level, the ROC has traditionally pursued interfaith dialogue with other Christian groups. Individuals associated with Russian Orthodox and Muslim hierarchies made numerous hostile statements opposing the decision and continued to consider it a source of tension.

A small splinter group of the RNE called "Russian Rebirth" registered successfully in the past in Tver and Nizhniy Novgorod as a social organization, prompting protests from human rights groups; however, in several regions such as Moscow and Kareliya, the authorities have limited the activities of the RNE by denying registration to their local affiliates. According to Sova Center, there were neither registration denials nor registrations of RNE during the reporting period.

Hostility toward non-Russian-Orthodox religious groups sparked harassment and occasionally physical attacks. The police investigation of the June 2004 killing of Nikolai Girenko, an expert on xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism, finally produced suspects in May 2006. Moscow newspapers reported that in late May 2006 officials detained five men in St. Petersburg for possible ties to the killing of an African student and on suspicion of the murder of Girenko, according to city prosecutor Sergey Zaitsev. The suspects, members of the Mad Crowd group, are thought to have killed Girenko as revenge for Girenko's testimony in court against another extremist group. Girenko had served for many years as an expert witness in trials involving alleged skinheads and neo-Nazis.

Muslims, the largest religious minority, continued to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some regions. After terrorists associated with Chechen, Ingush, and Islamic extremists seized a school in September 2004 in Beslan, North Ossetia, interethnic and interreligious tensions resulting in discrimination persisted in the region.

without the authorities' intervention, according to NGOs. Muslims claimed that citizens in certain regions feared Muslims, citing cases such as a dispute in Kolomna, approximately sixty miles southeast of Moscow, over the proposed construction of a mosque. Government officials, journalists, and the public have been quick to label Muslim organizations "Wahhabi," a term that has become equivalent with "extremist." Such sentiment has led to a formal ban on Wahhabism in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkariya. Numerous press reports documented anti-Islamic sentiment.

On March 14, 2006, in the republic of Karachayevo-Cherkessia, unknown persons armed with Kalashnikovs fired twenty seven cartridges at the home of mufti Ismail Hadzhi Berdiyev, chair of the Muslim Coordinated Council for Spiritual Management of Karachayevo-Cherkessia and Stavropol Regions.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers were generally harmonious. In Tatarstan, the authorities promoted the liberal brand of Islamic thought dubbed "Euro-Islam"; however, tensions occasionally emerged in the republic and the surrounding Volga region. Law enforcement organizations closely watched Muslim groups. Officials often described Muslim charitable organizations as providing aid to extremists in addition to their overt charitable work. Extremely traditional or orthodox versions of Islam were often associated in the public mind with terrorism and radical Muslim fighters in the North Caucasus.

Although the previous reporting period saw the chairman of the Council of Muftis, the head of the Central Spiritual Board of the country's Muslims, and the head of the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus jointly denounce terrorism, the national press carried stories during the reporting period highlighting their public differences in attitudes toward Wahabbism, among other things.

In April 2006, officials detained seven teenagers between the ages of fifteen and sixteen in the town of Dzerzhinsk in the Nizhniy Novgorod Region for throwing stones and a Molotov cocktail at a local mosque. An investigation was continuing. On December 2, 2005, vandals set on fire a two-story wooden building housing the Muslim Board of Komi, which housed a mosque. The fire destroyed the roof and damaged thirty square meters of the premises; there were no injuries. The emergency situations' authorities said the fire was the result of arson.

In February 2005, vandals desecrated twenty-six tombs in a Muslim cemetery in Yoshkar-Oly; in January 2005, vandals desecrated ten tombs in the Donskoye Muslim cemetery in Moscow. Teenagers were suspected of involvement in both of these incidents. In January 2005, vandals painted swastikas on the walls of the "Tauba" mosque in Nizhniy Novgorod. Investigators characterized these crimes as "mere hooliganism" rather than as hate crimes, or national and religious extremism.

Although a Yekaterinburg journalist reported militiamen barred women wearing the hijab from local subway stations on several occasions in 2005, she did not know of similar incidents in the reporting period nor of any overt signs of intolerance toward Muslims on religious grounds.

On May 21, 2006, in downtown Yaroslavl, skinheads reportedly kicked a thirty-year-old Hare Krishna in the stomach several times.

According to press reports, in September 2004, representatives of the Aleksandr Nevsky Patriotic Society disrupted a pre-approved demonstration organized by Hare Krishna members in Saratov, held in memory of the victims of the terrorist attack in Beslan.

On November 14, 2005, a thirty-six-year-old resident of the Smolensk region detonated an explosive device in the ROC Chapel near the town of Vyazma because of his "dislike for the Russian Orthodox Church." Officials charged him under the Criminal Code for vandalism, illegal possession of weapons and explosives, and willing destruction of property using explosives.

On March 11, 2006, vandals robbed and desecrated the church of the Resurrection of Christ in the Vysotskoye settlement in Yaroslavskaya Region. On February 26, 2006, teenagers desecrated a chapel in the Smolenskoye cemetery in St. Petersburg, and on February 5, 2006, vandals broke street lamps and spray-painted the Center of Russian Spirituality of the Orthodox Church of the Mother of God with xenophobic slogans.

During the reporting period, the tensions between the Vatican and the ROC notably decreased, although the Patriarchy in Moscow continued to object to the transfer of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic See from Lviv to Kiev, which occurred in August 2005. Other issues of concern that remained between the two groups include the ROC's continued negative perception that Roman Catholics proselytize across the country and a proposal by a local priest to open a small, three-room Catholic Carmelite convent whose main mission would be to work with orphans in the city of Nizhniy Novgorod. The ROC alleged that the convent would serve as a base for missionary activities, and the Catholic Church indicated that the convent was not a full-fledged convent but a means for caring for local orphans.

In a meeting in March 2006 with a Franciscan Order delegation, Patriarch Aleksey II reportedly said that he hoped the Catholic Church would stop proselytizing Orthodox believers and those with Orthodox roots because the rivalry in winning souls makes their work more difficult at a time when the world needs the fruit of both churches in their

Christian efforts.

In June 2005, Patriarch Aleksey met with the President of the Italian Parliament Pier Ferdinando and they jointly launched an appeal for Catholics and Orthodox to avoid "negative and anti-Christian tendencies" and to cooperate "against violence, egoism, and moral relativism."

In February 2006 Cardinal Roger Etchegaray traveled to Moscow to take part in celebrating the patriarch's birthday and feast day. Observers saw this as the result of the government's attempt to ease the tensions between the two churches and pave the way for a papal visit to Moscow, which President Putin has publicly championed, sending Foreign Minister Lavrov to the Vatican in June 2005.

On the night of April 27-28, 2006, vandals set fire to an Adventist church in Taganrog in Rostov Region, after breaking windows earlier that week. The fire was termed arson. It was the first such incident at that church.

Reports of the harassment of evangelicals and Pentecostals dramatically decreased during the reporting period. In contrast to previous reports and Helsinki Commission testimony in April 2005 about the vandalizing and burning of prayer houses in Nekrasovskoye, Chelyabinsk, Bratsk, Izhevsk, Buryatiya, Oshkar Ola, Khalsk, and Poldolsk, where authorities made no arrests, few such instances appeared to have occurred since September 2005, when Bishop Sergey Ryakhovskiy joined the Public Chamber. Nevertheless, African-Russian and African ministers of non-Orthodox Christian churches experienced prejudicial treatment, based apparently on a combination of religious and racial bigotry.

According to the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, in April 2005, the eve of Russian Orthodox Easter, vandals firebombed a Baptist church in Chelyabinsk. Local Baptists blame coverage in a news broadcast on a local television channel for characterizing the Baptists as a "totalitarian sect." According to church sources, after the fire, employees of the television station visited the church to apologize, saying they did not expect their report to have this effect. The station broadcast a retraction, and the pastor of the church and the local Baptist bishop called a press conference, this time receiving sympathetic television coverage.

Pickers held demonstrations outside New Life Church in Yekaterinburg on May 8, May 15, and May 22, 2005, but only a few people took part in them. Anti-Evangelical activists held pickets beginning in March 2005 in an attempt to demand city authorities evict the New Life Church from its building. This represented the near-cessation of members of the Orthodox Brotherhood and members of City Without Drugs picketing of Sunday services at Protestant churches in Yekaterinburg. The situation is calm according to the pastor of Living Word Church, the head of the Adventist congregation, and the Bishop of the New Life church. In April 2005, at the request of Protestant leaders, Yekaterinburg city officials began denying permission to groups who wished to picket outside Protestant churches, accusing members of these churches of torturing and even killing children, and espionage.

The press routinely continued to reference members of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious "sect," although they had been present in the country for approximately one-hundred years. In November 2004, the ROC-affiliated NGO Committee for the Salvation of Youth from Totalitarian Sects filed a claim with the prosecutor general seeking the dissolution of the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. A common prejudice circulating among the general public was that members of Jehovah's Witnesses are "spies of imperialism." In January 2004, the governor of Stavropol Kray compared members of Jehovah's Witnesses to Wahhabis. This comparison resonated particularly strongly in Stavropol, an area that had been attacked by Chechen separatists.

According to Interfax, in September 2005 Yekaterinburg Russian Orthodox Archbishop Vikenty invited listeners of the Voskresenie Diocesan radio station to convert Jehovah's Witnesses to the Orthodox faith, referring to their beliefs as "delusions."

During the reporting period, officials reported thirty cases of physical attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country while they engaged in their preaching work; of these, five took place in Moscow. The authorities did not take any action against the assailants.

In April 2006 unidentified individuals reportedly climbed over the fence of the Pskov Kingdom Hall and broke two windows.

After nearly two years of criminal proceedings, in March 2005, authorities found the Sakharov Center Director and a staff member guilty of inciting religious hatred and fined them approximately \$3,750 (100,000 rubles) each. Officials acquitted the third defendant of all charges. Although the Moscow City Court dismissed their appeal, the Center entered an appeal at the European Court in Strasbourg. The charges stemmed from a provocative 2003 exhibit of religious-themed art entitled "Danger, Religion!" Authorities never charged those who vandalized the exhibit with a crime, and the verdict leaves room for the state and the ROC to define parameters for religious and artistic expression.

During the reporting period, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice and a number of minority "nontraditional" religious leaders asserted that the Government and majority religious groups increasingly used the mass media, conferences,

and public demonstrations to foment opposition to minority religions as threats to physical, mental, and spiritual health; asserting that these groups threatened national security. Speakers associated with the ROC took part in antisect conferences and meetings around the country.

In 2004 the Izhevsk newspaper Infopanorama published an article that slandered the pastor of that city's Work of Faith Evangelical Church for which the newspaper later apologized. In Krasnodar Kray, the local Adventist congregation was unable to move the prosecutor general to initiate a criminal investigation against a television station that broadcast an allegation that the Adventists conducted ritual killings each year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. government continued to engage the Government, a number of religious groups, NGOs, and others in a regular dialogue on religious freedom. The U.S. embassy in Moscow and the consulates general in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok actively investigated reports of violations of religious freedom. In the period covered by this report, their contacts included government officials, representatives of all traditional and many "nontraditional" religious confessions, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, the Anti-Defamation League, lawyers representing religious groups, journalists, academics, and human rights activists.

The embassy and consulates worked with NGOs to encourage the development of programs designed to sensitize law enforcement officials and municipal and regional administration officials to recognize discrimination, prejudice, and crimes motivated by ethnic or religious intolerance. Senior embassy officials discussed religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the presidential administration and the Government, including the MFA, raising specific cases of concern. Federal officials responded by investigating some of those cases and by keeping embassy staff informed on issues they have raised. As part of continuing efforts to monitor the overall climate of religious tolerance, the embassy and consulates maintained frequent contact with working-level officials at the MOJ, presidential administration, and MFA.

The embassy addresses religious freedom by maintaining a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO communities. Two positions in the embassy's political section are dedicated to human rights and religious freedom issues. These officers work closely with other U.S. officers in Moscow and U.S. consulates around the country.

Consular officers routinely assisted U.S. citizens involved in criminal, customs, and immigration cases; officers were sensitive to any indications that these cases involved possible violations of religious freedom. Such issues were raised regularly in meetings with the Consular Department of the MFA and with the MVD. As U.S. missionaries and religious workers comprised a significant component of the local U.S. citizen population, the embassy conducted a vigorous outreach program to provide consular services, and to maintain contact for emergency planning purposes and to inquire about the missionaries' experiences vis-a-vis immigration, registration, and police authorities as one gauge of religious freedom.

The U.S. ambassador addressed religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He attended events on major religious holidays and often met with a range of religious leaders from various denominations. He hosted discussions on religious freedom with the leaders of major religious denominations.

The U.S. government continued to press the country to adhere to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the U.S. Department of State met regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations, as well as with visiting representatives of local religious organizations, the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, and members of the State Service Academy that trains regional officials in charge of registering local religious organizations.

Members of the staffs of the U.S. consulates general in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg met with religious leaders from a range of denominations in several cities in their consular district. During the reporting period, the consulate general in Yekaterinburg maintained a particularly active outreach program to the Muslim community of the Urals.

Consulate officials met with representatives of different religious groups in Ufa, including the chief mufti of the Central Muslim Spiritual Board, Talgat Tadjuddin, to discuss the current situation and U.S.-related issues.

As part of the embassy's outreach to the Muslim community and to promote tolerance, in summer 2005 the second annual English language camp sponsored by the embassy in Moscow and the consulate general in Yekaterinburg took place in Ufa, Bashkortostan. The two summer camps, each three weeks long, allowed approximately 200 children from low-income families to improve their English, leadership skills and understanding of U.S. culture.

In April 2006 the head of the Tajik NGO Somon who participated in the International Visitor Program (IVP) invited the Consul General to a seminar titled "Tolerance Starts at School." This seminar was the second stage of the "Teaching Tolerance" project sponsored by the Democracy Commission. The first stage took place in January 2006, and brought

together teachers and representatives of ethnic NGOs in Yekaterinburg. The third seminar, in May, was geared to law enforcement officials.

The U.S. government organized exchanges under the IVP with a focus on religious freedom issues. In February and March 2006, a group of religious leaders, NGO representatives, and journalists who covered religious tolerance issues from Yekaterinburg and Orenburg, visited the USA under the regional IVP "Community Activism in Promoting a Tolerant Society." After coming back, the Orthodox and Muslim religious leaders gave interviews to religion-oriented television and radio programs and newspapers, emphasizing their positive impressions of activities of U.S. NGOs, confessions, and government structures. A journalist published an article on this program in one of the major Yekaterinburg newspapers.

In February 2006, during the regional workshop for the American Corners, one session was devoted to outreach programs for the Muslim population. A deputy director of the Interethnic Information Center gave the coordinators advice on how to contact and attract the Muslim community to their events.

On February 28, 2006, 500 students from 7 Vladivostok universities attended a student conference sponsored by the consulate general in Vladivostok with the theme "Tolerance in Multi-Cultural, Multi-Ethnic, Multi-Faith Societies: Challenges, Practices, and Opportunities" at the Far Eastern State Technical University. More than fifty students delivered English-language presentations on international practices in tolerance, Consul General John Mark Pommersheim delivered opening remarks, and International Information Programs speaker Dr. Rock Brynner delivered the keynote address. There was also an NGO roundtable composed of U.S. government exchange program alumni that featured religious tolerance as well.

In September 2005 a speaker on religious tolerance visited Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, and Zlatoust, which had experienced problems between religious groups, and met with religious communities, officials, journalists, human rights activists, and students.

In March 2005, the consulate general in Yekaterinburg supported an academic conference on ethnic and religious tolerance at Orenburg State University. The conference drew participants from throughout the country and Kazakhstan. The mufti of Orenburg Oblast and the head of the Orthodox Church in Orenburg both participated in the conference.

In September 2004, the consulate general in Yekaterinburg sent a group of ten primarily Muslim community and religious leaders from the Urals to the United States on a program entitled "Promoting Multiculturalism in Civic Life." As a result, one participant, a television producer, devoted an episode of her television show "Islam Today" to religious freedom in the U.S. and, along with another participant, founded the "Interethnic Information Center," which followed media coverage of ethnic and religious minorities and worked to educate journalists and government officials on tolerance issues. The Democracy Commission gave them a small grant to create an on-line news portal for ethnic and religious organizations.

During the period covered by this report, the embassy's Democracy Commission, a small (up to \$24,000 or approximately 648,000 rubles) grants program supporting local NGOs working on a range of issues, approved 4 tolerance-related grants totaling approximately \$48,800 (approximately 1,317,600 rubles). A group of religious leaders from Yekaterinburg, representing multiple religious groups, participated in an International Visitor Leadership Program devoted to religious freedom of expression and the development of constructive interconfessional relations.

Between April 16 and 27, 2006, the Youth LINX program facilitated dialogues in Ivanovo, Kostroma, and Moscow among religious leaders in an effort to increase interfaith communication and understanding and expose local university students to tolerance issues. In Kostroma, for example, regional clergymen Father Grigoriy Chekmenyov, Father Mikhail Nasonov, Imam-Khatib Marat Zhalyaletdinov, and Rabbi Nison Mendl Ruppel served as panel experts, and a Kostroma State University student, trained on tolerance issues, moderated the discussion. Professors of the Philosophy Department of Kostroma State University and approximately fifty five students attended the event. Representatives of the Kostroma regional administration emphasized the importance of an open dialogue in promoting tolerance.

During the reporting period, the Southern Russia Resource Center (SRRC) conducted two workshops on interethnic tolerance specifically targeted to youth organizations, as well as a school for NGO leaders, two workshops in community mobilization in a post-conflict environment, and a public relations school for journalists and NGOs. The SRRC issued ten grants to six Chechen, three Ossetian, and one Ingush organizations to promote tolerance among youth in these republics; these projects ended in March 2006. In February 2006 the SRRC signed an agreement with the Ministry of Nationalities in Ingushetia to support SRRC's activities in the republic and to consult the Ministry about the issues of interethnic understanding and cooperation.

In June and July 2005, U.S. government grantee, SRRC, in partnership with the Tolerance Institute, conducted seminars for sixty participants from North Ossetia, Chechnya and Ingushetia, promoting models for how to prevent and address such problems as xenophobia, cultural ignorance, and interethnic conflict. Participants included NGO leaders, journalists, youth leaders, and regional and local government officials.

The United States supported two additional tolerance projects through the PartNER (Partnerships, Networking, Empowerment, and Roll-out) program, which ended in December 2004. One of these projects, the Ural NGO Support Center (UNGOSC), worked to encourage public discussion of ethnic and religious tolerance in Perm. UNGOSC worked with media outlets and various organizations to publicize program activities, conduct a training program for journalists to promote more responsible media coverage on racial and ethnic issues, recruit training participants and stage public awareness campaigns and seminars. Officials conducted the other tolerance project at the Volga Humanitarian-Theological Institute in Nizhniy Novgorod, which provided representatives of government and religious organizations with a series of seminars to educate participants and help them focus their thoughts and ideas on religious policy issues. The activity of religious communities in the Volga Federal District increased as a result of this project by uniting their efforts to assist street children, migrants, and other people in difficult situations and establishing a website to serve as a virtual resource center for state officials and community leaders.

In 2004-05, the U.S. continued to support through a grant the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal's "Climate of Trust" program, which focuses on forming and strengthening Regional Tolerance Councils in Kazan, Ryazan, and Leningrad Oblast. As the result of the program, officials introduced tolerance courses for militia cadets in the St. Petersburg Law Institute of the General Procuracy and the Ryazan Branch of the Moscow Academy of the MVD. Tatarstan's regional Ministry of Education signed an agreement on March 1, 2005, in which it pledged to include tolerance courses in continuing education programs for school teachers.

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