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U.S. Department of State

~~25/5 '04~~
25/5 '04**U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 2003 – China (includes Tibet) - December 2003**

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Released by the U.S. Department of State Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor on December 18, 2003, covers the period from July 1, 2002, to June 30, 2003.

The Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of the activity of religious groups. The Government tries to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of groups that could constitute sources of authority outside of the control of the Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Despite these efforts at government control, membership in many faiths is growing rapidly.

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for freedom of religion and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for many unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. Unregistered religious groups continued to experience varying degrees of official interference and harassment. Members of some unregistered religious groups, including Protestant and Catholic groups, were subjected to restrictions, which has led, in some cases, to intimidation, harassment and detention; however, the degree of restrictions varied significantly from region to region. In some localities, "underground" religious leaders reported increased pressure either to register with the State Administration for Religious Activities (SARA, formerly known as the central Religious Affairs Bureau) or its provincial and local offices, still known as Religious Affairs Bureaus (RAB). They also reported facing pressure to be affiliated with and supervised by official party organizations linked to the legally recognized churches, in order to prevent their facilities from being closed. In other localities, officials worked closely with Buddhist, Catholic, and Protestant groups building schools, medical facilities and retirement centers for poor communities. In the latter cases, local officials frequently encouraged Western religious groups to work in their communities to supply much-needed social services, provided that the groups did not proselytize openly. Many religious adherents reported that they are able to practice their faith in officially registered places of worship and to maintain contacts with coreligionists in other parts of the world without interference from the authorities. Official sources, religious professionals, and persons who attend services at both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all reported that the numbers of believers in the country continued to grow.

Senior government officials claim that China has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. Nonetheless, observers have witnessed some local officials prevent children from attending worship services and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than 18 from entering, including mosques in Xinjiang Province. Senior government officials have declined to publicly clarify China's policy toward minors and religion.

The Government continued its repression of groups that it determined to be "cults" in general and of the Falun Gong in particular. The arrest, detention and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued. Practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs are sometimes subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and reeducation-through-labor camps. There have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse.

The communities of the five official religions – Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestantism – coexist without significant friction; however, in some parts of the country relations between registered and unregistered Christian churches are tense.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. President Bush discussed religious freedom during his October 2002 meeting with then-President Jiang Zemin. Senior officials called on China to halt the abusive treatment of religious adherents and respect religious freedom. In October 2002, the Secretary of State designated China a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The country has been so designated since 1999. The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made concerted efforts to encourage religious freedom. In Washington and in Beijing, in public and in private, U.S. officials repeatedly urged the Government to respect citizens' rights to exercise religious freedom and to seek the release of all those serving sentences for religious activities. U.S. officials protested and asked for further information about numerous individual religious prisoners. During this reporting period, some religious prisoners were released, including Tibetan nun Ngawang Sangdrol. The issue of religious freedom also was raised during the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialog in Beijing in December 2002, which was attended by both the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. Part of the U.S. delegation, led by the Assistant Secretary, traveled to Xinjiang to meet with Muslim clerics and government officials and to express concern that authorities were using the war on terrorism as a pretext to persecute Uighur Muslims. As a result of the bilateral dialog, the Chinese agreed to host separate a visit by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance. As of the end of the reporting period, this visit had yet to take place.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 3.5 million square miles, and its population is approximately 1.3 billion. According to an April 2002 Government White Paper, there are more than 200 million religious adherents, representing a great variety of beliefs and practices. According to this official publication, the country has more than 100,000 sites for religious activities, 300,000 clergy, more than 3,000 religious organizations and 74 training centers for clergy. Most religious adherents profess Eastern faiths, but tens of millions adhere to Christianity or Islam. Approximately 8 percent of the population are Buddhist, approximately 1.4 percent are Muslim, an estimated 0.4 percent belong to the official Catholic Church, an estimated 0.4 to 0.8 percent belong to the unofficial Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church, an estimated 0.8 to 1.2 percent are registered Protestants and an estimated 2.4 percent worship in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control. There are no available estimates on the number of Taoists; however, according to the Taoist Association there are more than 30,000 Taoist monks and nuns and more than 1,500 Taoist temples.

Traditional folk religions (worship of local gods, heroes and ancestors) have been revived, are practiced by hundreds of millions of citizens and are tolerated to varying degrees as loose affiliates of Taoism, Buddhism or ethnic minority cultural practices.

Buddhists make up the largest body of organized religious believers. The Government estimates that there are more than 100 million Buddhists, most of whom are from the dominant Han ethnic group. However, it is difficult to estimate accurately the number of Buddhists because they do not have congregational memberships and often do not

participate in public ceremonies. The Government reports that there are 16,000 Buddhist temples and monasteries and more than 200,000 nuns and monks.

According to government figures, there are 20 million Muslims, over 40,000 Islamic places of worship (at least half of which are in Xinjiang Autonomous Region) and more than 45,000 imams nationwide.

The unofficial, Vatican-affiliated Catholic Church claims a membership far larger than the 5 million persons registered with the official Catholic Church. Precise figures are impossible to determine, but Vatican officials have estimated that China has as many as 10 million Catholics in both the official and unofficial churches. According to official figures, the government-approved Catholic Church has 69 bishops, 5,000 clergy and over 5,600 churches and meeting houses. There are thought to be some 37 bishops operating "underground," some of whom are likely in prison or under house arrest.

The Government maintains that China has 15 million registered Protestants, 20,000 clergy, more than 12,000 churches and approximately 25,000 registered Protestant meeting places. Foreign and Chinese sources estimate that some 30 million persons worship in Protestant house churches that are independent of government control.

Estimates of the number of Falun Gong (or Wheel of the Law, also known as Falun Dafa) practitioners have varied widely; the Government claimed that prior to its harsh crackdown on the Falun Gong beginning in 1999, there may have been as many as 2.1 million adherents of Falun Gong in the country. Some experts estimated that the true number of Falun Gong adherents in the country before the crackdown was in the tens of millions. One credible source estimated that there were still 1 million Falun Gong practitioners in the country during the period covered by this report. Falun Gong blends aspects of Taoism, Buddhism and the meditation techniques and physical exercises of qigong (a traditional Chinese exercise discipline) with the teachings of Falun Gong leader Li Hongzhi (a native of the country who lives in the United States). Despite the spiritual content of some of Li's teachings, Falun Gong does not consider itself a religion and has no clergy or places of worship.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship, and to control the growth and scope of the activity of religious groups to prevent the rise of competing possible sources of authority outside of the control of the Government.

The Criminal Law states that government officials who deprive citizens of religious freedom may, in serious cases, be sentenced to up to 2 years in prison; however, there were no known cases of persons being punished under this statute.

The State reserves to itself the right to register and thus to allow particular religious groups and spiritual movements to operate. There are five officially recognized religions: Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Islam, and Taoism. For each faith there is a government-affiliated association that monitors and supervises its activities. The State Council's State Administration for Religious Activities is responsible for monitoring and judging the legitimacy of religious activity. The SARA and the CCP United Front Work Department (UFWD), both of which are staffed by officials who rarely, if ever, are religious adherents, provide policy "guidance and supervision" on the implementation of government regulations on religious activity, including the role of foreigners in religious activity.

There are six requirements for the registration of "venues for religious activity": Possession

of a physical site; citizens who are religious believers and who regularly take part in religious activity; an organized governing board; a minimum number of followers; a set of operating rules; and a legal source of income. Government officials claim that registration requirements are simple and places of worship are not required to affiliate with one of the five official "patriotic" religious organizations that correspond to the five recognized faiths. However, when a new Protestant church approaches government authorities expressing a desire to register, it is often asked to affiliate with the (Protestant) Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council (TSPM/CCC). This, coupled with the very small number of registered Protestant churches not affiliated with the TSPM/CCC, has led some analysts to conclude that there is a de facto requirement for Protestant religious organizations to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. Similarly, credentialing procedures often require clergy to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. One exception is the (Russian) Orthodox Church, which is not affiliated with TSPM/CCC and operates relatively unfettered in Harbin.

China does not recognize Protestant denominations. Many unregistered evangelical Protestant groups refuse to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC because they have theological differences with the TSPM/CCC's "nondenominational" teachings, which state that all Protestant beliefs are compatible. Some of these unregistered Protestant groups have expressed a willingness to register with the Government if they would be allowed not to affiliate with the TSPM/CCC. Some groups register voluntarily, some register under pressure and the authorities refuse to register others. Some religious groups have been reluctant to comply with the regulations out of principled opposition to state control of religion or due to fear of adverse consequences if they reveal, as required, the names and addresses of church leaders. Unregistered groups also frequently refuse to register on the grounds that theological compromises, lack of doctrinal freedom, and stricter control over sermons by government authorities result from registration. Unofficial groups claimed that authorities refused them registration without explanation. The Government contended that these refusals mainly were the result of these groups' lack of adequate facilities.

The Government has banned all groups that it has determined to be "cults," including the Falun Gong and the Zhong Gong movements (Zhong Gong is a qigong exercise discipline with some mystical tenets). After the revised Criminal Law came into effect in 1997, offenses related to membership in unapproved cults and religious groups were classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. Most experts attribute the subsequent sharp rise in trials for this category of crimes to the new classification.

Government sensitivity to Muslim communities varied widely. In some predominantly Muslim areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially in Xinjiang among the Uighurs, officials continued to restrict religious expression and teaching. Police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused of supporting separatism. However, the Government took some steps during the period covered by this report to demonstrate respect for the country's Muslims, including by issuing statements on major Islamic holidays. The Government permits, and in some cases subsidizes, Muslim citizens who make the Hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca. In 2002, approximately 2,000 persons were permitted to make the Hajj with government-organized delegations, while up to an additional 2,000 privately organized Hajjis went on their own after securing government approval. Some also traveled to Mecca from third countries. According to reports, Uighur Muslims have greater difficulty getting permission to make the Hajj than other Muslim ethnic groups, such as the Hui Muslims.

During the period covered by this report, local officials destroyed several unregistered places of worship around the country, although there were no reports of the widespread razing of churches. The Government has restored or rebuilt churches, temples, mosques and monasteries damaged or destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and allowed the reopening of some seminaries, although the pace and scope of restoration activity has varied from locality to locality. Although there is far greater interest in religion and a far greater number of religious adherents today, there are far fewer temples, churches, or mosques than existed 35 years ago and many of those that exist are overcrowded and in poor condition.

The CCP Central Committee held a national religion work conference in Beijing from December 10 to 12, 2001. All senior members of the Party and senior government officials attended, and both then President Jiang Zemin and then Premier Zhu Rongji gave speeches. Subsequently, many provinces and cities held their own work conferences on religion in 2002 and 2003 and some issued new regulations governing religious affairs. While some religious analysts believe these new regulations will make China's religious policies more transparent, others fear they will simply codify ways to persecute adherents of proscribed beliefs. In some locales, religious groups report it is easier to register places of worship than it was before the work conferences. In other areas, however, crackdowns against unsanctioned groups are linked to the new regulations. Since the 2001 national work conference, numerous scholars and religious leaders report greater freedom in discussing the role of religion in society and an open debate allowing criticism of the traditional Marxist concept of opposing religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, the Government's respect for religious freedom and freedom of conscience remained poor, especially for members of some unregistered religious groups and spiritual movements such as the Falun Gong. The Government tends to perceive unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority and it attempts to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of groups or sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP. During the period covered by this report, some local authorities continued a selective crackdown on unregistered churches, temples and mosques, and the Central Government failed to stop these activities. Police closed underground mosques, temples and seminaries, as well as some Catholic churches and Protestant "house churches," many with significant memberships, properties, financial resources and networks. Several unregistered church leaders reported growing pressure by local authorities to register after the December 2001 work conference on religion. Despite these efforts at control, official sources, religious professionals and members of both officially sanctioned and underground places of worship all report that the number of religious adherents in the country continued to grow. The Government also makes demands on the clergy or leadership of registered groups, for example, requiring that they publicly endorse government policies or denounce Falun Gong. The Government continued its harsh repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement and of cults in general. As in past years, local authorities moved against houses of worship outside their control that grew too large or espoused beliefs considered threatening to "state security." Overall, the basic policy of permitting religious activity to take place relatively unfettered in government approved sites and under government control remained unchanged.

Official tolerance for Buddhism and Taoism has been greater than that for Christianity, and these religions often face fewer restrictions. However, as these non-Western religions have grown rapidly in recent years, there were signs of greater government concern and new restrictions, especially on syncretistic groups that blend tenets from a number of religious beliefs.

In 1995, the State Council and the CCP's Central Committee issued a circular labeling a number of religious organizations "cults" and making them illegal. Among these were the "Shouters" (founded in the United States in 1962), Eastern Lightning, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), the Full Scope Church, the Spirit Sect, the New Testament Church and the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy). Subsequent orders in later years also banned the Lord God Sect, the Established King Church, the Unification Church, the Family of Love, the Dami Mission and other groups.

In 1999, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress adopted a decision, under Article 300 of the Criminal Law, to ban all groups the Government determined to be cults, including the Falun Gong. The Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate also provided legal directives on applying the existing criminal law to the Falun Gong. The law, as applied following these actions, specifies prison terms of 3 to 7

years for "cult" members who "disrupt public order" or distribute publications. Under the law, cult leaders and recruiters may be sentenced to 7 years or more in prison.

During the period covered by this report, government repression of the Falun Gong spiritual movement continued. Thousands of individuals are still undergoing criminal, administrative, and extrajudicial punishment for engaging in Falun Gong practices, admitting that they adhere to the teachings of Falun Gong, or simply refusing to criticize the organization or its founder. There have been credible reports of deaths due to torture and abuse of Falun Gong practitioners who refuse to recant their beliefs while incarcerated in prison and reeducation through labor camps.

The authorities also continued to oppose other groups considered to be "cults," such as the Xiang Gong, Guo Gong and Zhong Gong qigong groups, some of which reportedly had a following comparable to that of the Falun Gong.

Folk religions have been labeled as "feudal superstition" and followers sometimes are subject to harassment and repression.

The Government continued a national campaign to enforce 1994 State Council regulations and subsequent provincial regulations that require all places of religious activity to register with government religious affairs authorities. There was a great deal of variation in how local authorities handled unregistered religious groups. In certain regions, government supervision of religious activity was minimal, and registered and unregistered churches existed openly side-by-side and were treated similarly by the authorities. In such areas, many congregants worshipped in both types of churches. In other regions, local implementing regulations call for strict government oversight of religion, and authorities cracked down on unregistered churches and their members. For example, Zhejiang Province has restrictive religious affairs regulations stipulating that "illegal" property and income would be confiscated from those who: "1) preside over or organize religious activities at places other than those for religious activities or at places not approved by a religious affairs department; 2) do missionary work outside the premises of a place of religious activity; and, 3) sponsor religious training activities without obtaining the approval of a religious affairs department at or above the county level." Implementing regulations, provincial work reports and other government and Party documents continued to exhort officials to enforce vigorously government policy regarding unregistered churches.

In some areas, despite the rapidly growing religious population, it remained difficult to register new places of worship, even for officially recognized churches and mosques.

Due to a lack of transparent guidelines, local officials have great discretion in determining whether "house churches" violate regulations. The term is used to describe both unregistered churches and gatherings in homes or businesses of groups of Christians to conduct small, private worship services. Unregistered churches are illegal, but prayer meetings and Bible study groups held in house churches are legal and generally are not subject to registration requirements so long as they remain small and unobtrusive. In some parts of the country, unregistered house churches with hundreds of members meet openly with the full knowledge of local authorities, who characterize the meetings as informal gatherings to, pray, sing and study the Bible. In other areas, house church meetings of more than a handful of family members and friends are strictly proscribed. House churches often encounter difficulties when their membership grows, when they arrange for the regular use of facilities for the specific purpose of conducting religious activities, or when they forge links with other unregistered groups. Some observers cite the serious overcrowding in many registered churches as an explanation for the rapid rise in attendance at house churches and underground churches.

In the past, some local officials were said to deny registration to churches as a means to avoid regulations requiring them to give land to registered church groups. In addition to refusing to register churches, there also were reports that local officials have requested illegal "donations" from churches in their jurisdictions as a means of raising extra revenue

or that they sometimes appropriate a percentage of funds raised at local churches. Christian and Taoist leaders in several parts of the country reported that local officials have been reluctant to return church property that was confiscated after the 1949 Communist revolution.

Both official and unofficial Christian churches have problems training adequate numbers of clergy to meet the needs of their growing congregations. Due to the restrictions on religion between 1955 and 1985, no priests or other clergy in the official churches were ordained during that period; most priests and pastors were trained either before 1955 or after 1985, resulting in a shortage of trained clerics between the ages of 40 and 70. Thus, as senior clerics retire, there are relatively few experienced clerics to replace them. The Government permits registered religions to train clergy and allows limited numbers of Catholic and Protestant seminarians, Muslim clerics and Buddhist clergy to go abroad for additional religious studies, but some religious students have had difficulty in obtaining approval to study abroad. In most cases, foreign organizations provide funding for such training programs. Some Catholic clerics also have complained that they were forced to bribe local officials before being allowed to enter seminaries. Due to government prohibitions, unofficial or underground churches have particularly significant problems training clergy and many clergy receive only limited and inadequate preparation.

Most religious institutions depend upon their own resources to cover operating costs. Contributions from church members are common among both Catholics and Protestants. Frequently, some religious institutions run side businesses selling religious items while others run strictly commercial businesses, such as restaurants. Sometimes the Government funds repairs for temples or shrines that have cultural or historic significance; however, there were reports that these funds were allocated only to registered churches, depending upon how cooperative with local authorities they were perceived to be.

The law does not prohibit religious believers from holding public office; however, Party membership is required for almost all high level positions in government. State-owned businesses and organizations, and Communist Party officials restated during the period covered by this report that Party membership and religious belief are incompatible. This has a disproportionate effect in such minority-inhabited areas as Xinjiang and Tibet. The CCP reportedly has issued two circulars since 1995 ordering Party members not to adhere to religious beliefs and ordering the expulsion of Party members who belong to religious organizations, whether open or clandestine. High-ranking Communist Party officials, including then President and CCP Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, also have stated that Party members cannot be religious adherents. Muslims allegedly have been fired from government posts for praying during working hours. The "Routine Service Regulations" of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) state explicitly that servicemen "may not take part in religious or superstitious activities." Party and PLA military personnel have been expelled for adhering to the Falun Gong spiritual movement.

However, according to government sources, up to 25 percent of Communist Party officials in certain localities engage in some kind of religious activity. Most officials who practice a religion are Buddhist or practice a form of folk religion. Some religious figures, while not members of the CCP, are included in national and local government organizations, usually to represent their constituency on cultural and educational matters. The National People's Congress (NPC) includes several religious leaders. Two of the NPC Standing Committee's vice chairmen are Fu Tieshan, a bishop and vice-chairman of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, and Pagbalha Geleg Namgyai, a Tibetan "living Buddha." Religious groups also are represented in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory forum that is led by the CCP and consults with social groups outside the Party.

In 1999, the Party's Central Committee issued a document directing the authorities to tighten control over the official Catholic Church and to eliminate the underground Catholic Church if it did not bend to government control. There has been continued pressure by the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association on underground Catholic bishops to join the official church, and the authorities have reorganized dioceses without consulting church leaders.

The Government has not established diplomatic relations with the Holy See and there is no Vatican representative on the mainland. The Government's refusal to allow the official Catholic Church to recognize the authority of the Papacy in many fundamental matters of faith and morals has led many Catholics to reject joining the official Catholic Church on the grounds that this denies one of the fundamental tenets of their faith. The Government insists that Catholic Patriotic Association officials, clergy and believers be "patriotic" and "law abiding." When government policy and Papal authority conflict – as they do, for example, on abortion or birth control – state policy takes precedence, leaving priests with the dilemma of how to advise their practitioners.

Most bishops of the official Catholic Church are, in fact, clandestinely recognized by the Vatican. Nonetheless, tensions between the Vatican and the Government have caused leadership problems within the official Catholic Church in the country due to the friction between some bishops who have been consecrated with secret Vatican approval (or who obtained such secret approval after their consecration) and others consecrated without such approval. While both Chinese and Vatican authorities state that they would welcome an agreement to normalize relations, disagreements concerning the role of the Pope in selecting bishops and the status of underground Catholic clerics have frustrated efforts to reach this goal.

There are large Muslim populations in many areas, but government sensitivity to these communities varied widely. Generally speaking, China's Hui Muslims who often live in Han Chinese communities throughout the country have greater religious freedom than Turkic Muslims such as the Uighurs who are concentrated in Western China. In areas where ethnic unrest has occurred, especially among the Uighurs in Xinjiang, officials continued to restrict the building of mosques and prohibited the teaching of Islam to children. In addition to the restrictions on practicing religion placed on Party members and government officials throughout the country, in Xinjiang, teachers, professors and university students are not allowed openly to practice religion. However, in other areas, particularly in areas populated by the Hui ethnic group, there was substantial mosque construction and renovation, and apparent freedom to worship. After a series of violent incidents, including bombings attributed to Uighur separatists, beginning in 1997 and continuing into the period covered by this report, police cracked down on Muslim religious activity and places of worship accused of supporting separatism in Xinjiang. Because the Xinjiang government regularly fails to distinguish carefully between those involved in peaceful activities in support of independence, "illegal" religious activities and violent terrorism, it is often difficult to determine whether particular raids, detentions, arrests, or judicial punishments targeted those seeking to worship, those peacefully seeking their political goals, or those engaged in violence.

Xinjiang provincial-level Communist Party and government officials repeatedly called for stronger management of religious affairs and for the separation of religion from administrative matters. For example, on March 6, 2002, State Councilor Ismail Amat (an ethnic Uighur) told a delegation of National People's Congress delegates that, "while enjoying the rights of religious freedom, the citizens who have religious beliefs must place the basic interests of the State and the people before everything else," and that "we must not use the freedom of religious belief as an excuse to abandon or to dodge the management of religious affairs by the State." The official Xinjiang Legal Daily newspaper reported in 2000 that a township in Bay (Baicheng) County had recently found cases of "religious interference" in judicial, marriage and family planning matters. In response, the authorities began conducting monthly political study sessions for religious personnel and the authorities began to implement more vigorously restrictions on the religious education of youths under the age of 18. During the period covered by this report, observers still reported signs on mosques in Xinjiang banning anyone under 18.

In a growing number of areas, the authorities have displayed increasing tolerance of religious practice by foreigners, so long as their religious observance does not involve Chinese nationals. Weekly services of the foreign Jewish community in Beijing have been held uninterrupted since 1995, and High Holy Day observances have been allowed for more

than 15 years. Both reform and Orthodox Jewish services were held weekly during the period covered by this report. The Shanghai Jewish community has received permission from authorities to hold services on several occasions in an historic Shanghai synagogue, which was restored as a museum in 1998. Local authorities continue to allow the use of the synagogue on a case-by-case basis for major holidays. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) meets regularly in a number of cities, but its membership is limited strictly to the expatriate community.

The authorities permit officially sanctioned religious organizations to maintain international contacts that do not involve "foreign control." What constitutes "control" is not defined. Regulations enacted in 1994, and expanded in 2000, codified many existing rules involving foreigners, including a ban on proselytizing. However, for the most part, the authorities allowed foreign nationals to preach to other foreigners, to bring in religious materials for personal use and to preach to Chinese citizens at churches, mosques and temples at the invitation of registered religious organizations. Foreigners legally are barred from conducting missionary activities; however, foreign Christians teaching English and other languages on college campuses openly profess their faith with minimum interference from the authorities, so long as their proselytizing remains low-key. Many Christian groups throughout the country have developed close ties with local officials, in some cases operating schools and homes for the care of the aged. In addition, Buddhist-run private schools and orphanages in the central part of the country also offer training to teenagers and young adults. However, the Hong Kong Catholic Church's contacts with its mainland counterparts in the official Catholic Church remained on hold due to restrictions imposed by the Government.

The increase in the number of Christians in the country has resulted in a corresponding increase in the demand for Bibles. One printing company, a joint venture with an overseas Christian organization, has printed over 25 million Bibles since its founding in 1987, including Bibles in Braille and minority languages, such as Korean, Jingbo, Lisu, Lahu, Miao and Yao. Although Bibles can be purchased at some bookstores, they cannot be ordered directly from publishing houses by individuals. However, they were available for purchase at most officially recognized churches, at which many house church members buy their Bibles without incident. In some locations, underground churches are supplied with Bibles by registered churches. Nonetheless, some underground Christians hesitated to buy Bibles at official churches because such transactions sometimes involve receipts that identify the purchaser. Foreign experts confirm reports of chronic shortages of Bibles primarily due to limited print runs at the one government-approved publisher and logistical problems in disseminating Bibles to rural areas. The situation has improved this year, including distribution to house churches. Customs officials continued to monitor for the "smuggling" of Bibles and other religious materials into the country. There have been credible reports that the authorities sometimes confiscate Bibles in raids on house churches.

The Government teaches atheism in schools. Senior government officials claim that China has no restrictions against minors practicing religious beliefs. However, observers have noted some local officials, especially in Xinjiang, prevent children from attending worship services and some places of worship have signs prohibiting persons younger than 18 from entering. Senior government officials have not expressed a willingness to clarify this discrepancy. In some Muslim areas, minors attend religious schools in addition to state-run schools. In some areas, large numbers of young persons attend religious services at both registered and unregistered places of worship. Official religious organizations administer local Bible schools, 54 Catholic and Protestant seminaries, nine institutes to train imams and Islamic scholars and numerous institutes to train Buddhist monks. Students who attend these institutes must demonstrate "political reliability," and all graduates must pass an examination on their theological and political knowledge to qualify for the clergy. The Government has stated that there are ten colleges conducting Islamic higher education and two other Islamic schools in Xinjiang operating with government support. Some young Muslims study outside of the country in Muslim religious schools.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

During the period covered by this report, unapproved religious and spiritual groups remained under scrutiny and, in some cases, repression. Although there was no significant change in the central Government's official policy toward religious freedom, the unremitting campaign against the Falun Gong and other "cults," plus frequent statements by senior leaders on the need to "strengthen religious work" (or increase supervision of religious groups by the Government), had an inevitable spillover effect.

According to Falun Gong practitioners in the United States, since 2000 over 100,000 practitioners have been detained without trial in reeducation-through-labor camps. On August 9, 2002, the Cambodian government, under pressure from the Chinese Embassy in Cambodia, deported back to China two Chinese Falun Gong practitioners who had been designated as refugees by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees. In 2003, the Chinese Government sentenced American citizen Falun Gong practitioner Charles Lee to 3 years in prison. Despite the fact that his imprisonment was due to illegal interference with Chinese television broadcasts, while incarcerated, he was asked to recant his beliefs and was subjected to abuse when he refused. Many other Falun Gong adherents have suffered this kind of abuse. During April to June 2003, official Chinese media accused Falun Gong adherents of "undermining anti-SARS operations." Over 180 Falun Gong adherents were detained for allegedly inciting public panic and "spreading false rumors about SARS."

Offenses related to membership in unapproved religious groups are classified as crimes of disturbing the social order. According to the Law Yearbook of China, arrests for disturbing the social order or cheating by the use of superstition totaled 12,826 in 2002, down significantly from previous years. Most experts agree that the spike in detentions on these charges in 1999-2000 resulted from the Government's crackdown, begun in mid-1999, on spiritual groups like the Falun Gong, the Society of Disciples (Mentu Hui), evangelical Christian groups, localized Buddhist groups such as the Guan Yin (also known as Guanyin Famin, or the Way of the Goddess of Mercy), Protestant house churches and the underground Roman Catholic Church. In some areas, security authorities used threats, demolition of unregistered property, extortion, interrogation, detention and at times beatings and torture to harass leaders of unauthorized groups and their followers. Unregistered religious groups that preach beliefs outside the bounds of officially approved doctrine (such as imminent coming of the Apocalypse or holy war) or groups that have charismatic leaders often are singled out for particularly severe harassment. Some observers have attributed the unorthodox beliefs of some of these groups to under-trained clergy. Others acknowledge that some individuals may be exploiting the reemergence of interest in religion for personal gain.

Many religious leaders and adherents have been detained, arrested, or sentenced to prison terms. Local authorities also use an administrative process to punish members of unregistered religious groups. Citizens may be sentenced by a non-judicial panel of police and local authorities to up to 3 years in reeducation-through-labor camps. Many religious detainees and prisoners were held in such facilities during the period covered by this report. In July 2002, three underground Catholic priests from Baoding, Hebei province were reportedly sentenced to 3 years in a labor camp for engaging in "cult" activities. In the same month, a number of children were detained for attending an illegal catechism class in Dongan village, Fujian Province. The nun who organized the course was held for 15 days. On December 8, 2002, Gouxing "Philip" Xu was arrested in Shanghai for unlicensed preaching and sentenced to 18 months re-education-through-labor. In January 2003, the official Beijing People's Security Daily reported that police in Neixiang County, Henan Province raided three churches and detained at least 176 members of the banned "Full Scope Church." Shortly before Easter 2003, Father Zheng Ruipin of Changli, Fujian Province and 18 students at an underground Catholic seminary were detained for a month after police raided their school. In May 2003, a second priest was detained and reportedly beaten in the same town. In June 2003, 12 Christians in Funing County, Yunnan Province were detained for 15-20 days for disturbing social order when they reportedly tried to register their underground church with local officials.

Legal proceedings involving Gong Shengliang, founder of the unregistered South China

Church, and several other leaders continued during the period covered by this report. Sentenced to death in December 2001 on criminal charges including rape, arson and assault, Gong Shengliang, Xiu Fuming and Hu Yong had their sentences reduced to life in prison in October 2002. Li Ying and Bang Kun Gong had their sentences reduced from death to 15 years in prison. A few hours after being released from prison, four female church members were rearrested. According to friends, Xiang Fengping, Meng Xicun, Li Yingping and Li Xianzhi were planning to press charges against prison officials who tortured them and forced them to sign false statements against Gong Shengliang. They were detained in order to prevent a lawsuit and have been sentenced to 3 years reeducation-through-labor.

In Hebei, where an estimated half of the country's Catholics reside, friction between unofficial Catholics and local authorities continued. Hebei authorities have been known to force many underground priests and believers to choose between joining the official Church or facing punishment such as fines, job loss, periodic detentions and, in some cases, having their children barred from school. Some Catholics have been forced into hiding. The whereabouts of underground Catholic Bishop Su Zhimin, whose followers reported that he was arrested in 1997, remained unclear, despite repeated inquiries from the international community on his status. Underground Catholic sources in Hebei claimed that he still was in detention, while the Government denied having taken "any coercive measures" against him. Reliable sources reported that Bishop Su's auxiliary bishop, An Shuxin, as well as Father Han Dingxian in Hebei and Father Li Hongye of Henan remain under detention. A priest in Wenzhou, Zhejiang, was reportedly detained on June 16, 2003 when preparing to administer sacraments to a dying Catholic. According to several nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), a number of Catholic priests and lay leaders were beaten or otherwise abused during the period covered by this report.

Protestant church members in some parts of the country complained that central government support for local crackdowns on Fujian-based Shouters and Hubei's South China Church had created a sense of intimidation in their communities.

Some underground Catholic and Protestant leaders reported increased pressure to register their congregations after the December 2001 Central Committee Work Conference on Religion.

Police often used excessive force when detaining peaceful Falun Gong protesters. During the period covered by this report, there were credible reports that police and security force personnel abused, tortured and even killed Falun Gong practitioners while in custody. According to the Falun Gong, hundreds of its practitioners have been confined to psychiatric institutions and forced to take medications or undergo electric shock treatment against their will.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The communities of the five official religions – Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Catholicism and Protestantism – coexist without significant friction. However, in some parts of the country, there is a tense relationship between registered and unregistered Christian churches. There were reports of divisions within both the official Protestant church and the house church movement over issues of doctrine; in both the registered and unregistered Protestant churches there are conservative and more liberal groups. In other areas, the two groups coexist without problems. In some provinces, including Hebei, underground and official Catholic communities sometimes have a tense relationship. In the past, Muslims and

Tibetan Buddhists have complained about the presence of Christian missionaries in their communities. In general, the majority of the population shows little interest in the affairs of the religious minority beyond visiting temples during festivals or churches on Christmas Eve or Easter. Religious/ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetans and Uighurs, experience societal discrimination not only because of their religious beliefs but also because of their status as ethnic minorities with different language and culture from the typically wealthier Han Chinese. There also has been occasional tension between the Han and the Hui, a Muslim ethnic group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Consulates General in Chengdu, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Shenyang made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in the country, using both focused external pressure on abuses and support for positive trends within the country. In exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, diplomatic personnel consistently urged both central and local authorities to respect citizens' rights to religious freedom. U.S. officials protested vigorously whenever there were credible reports of religious harassment or discrimination in violation of international laws and standards, and requested information in cases of alleged mistreatment in which the facts were incomplete or contradictory. At the same time, U.S. officials made the case to the country's leaders that freedom of religion can strengthen, not harm, the country. In October 2002, President Bush met with then President Jiang Zemin and called for greater religious tolerance.

The U.S. Embassy and Consulates also collected information about abuses and maintained contacts with a wide spectrum of religious leaders within the country's religious communities, including bishops, priests, and ministers of the official Christian and Catholic churches, as well as Taoist, Muslim and Buddhist leaders. U.S. officials also met with leaders and members of the unofficial Christian churches. The Department of State's nongovernmental contacts include experts on religion in China, human rights organizations and religious groups in the United States.

The Department of State has sent a number of Chinese religious leaders and scholars to the United States on international visitor programs to see firsthand the role that religion plays in U.S. society. The Embassy also brought experts on religion from the United States to the country to speak about the role of religion in American life and public policy.

In July 2001, the Government agreed to resume the official U.S.-China Human Rights Dialog, which had been suspended since 1999. A dialog took place in October 2001 and again in December 2002, when the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, accompanied by the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, attended the U.S.-China Human Rights Dialog in Beijing. Religious freedom was a major agenda item. After the Dialog, the U.S. delegation traveled to Urumqi, Xinjiang and met with Muslim clerics and government officials to call on Chinese authorities not to use the war on terrorism as an excuse to persecute Uighur Muslims.

In the past, government officials occasionally have refused to grant meetings to U.S. Embassy officials who intended to raise religious freedom or other human rights issues. However, after the 2002 Dialog, China extended an invitation to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance to visit China. As of the end of the reporting period, this visit had yet to take place.

U.S. officials in Washington and Beijing have continued to protest individual incidents of abuse. On numerous occasions, both the Department of State and the Embassy in Beijing protested government actions to curb freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, including the arrests of Falun Gong followers, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang and Catholic and Christian clergy and believers.

In 2002, the Secretary of State designated China a country of particular concern under the International Religious Freedom Act for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. The country has been so designated since 1999.

Tibet

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous counties and prefectures in other provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China. The Department of State follows these designations in its reporting. The preservation and development of the Tibetan people's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage and the protection of their fundamental human rights continue to be of concern.

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief; however, the Government maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibet. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppress those activities viewed as vehicles for political dissent, such as religious activities that are perceived as advocating Tibetan independence or any form of separatism (which the Chinese Government describes as "splittist").

The Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, rendering it difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. Restrictions on religious practice and places of worship continued during the period covered by this report, but the atmosphere for lay practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism continued to be more relaxed. The atmosphere for religious freedom varied from region to region, and was considerably more relaxed in Tibetan autonomous areas outside the TAR. Envoys of the Dalai Lama made two visits to Tibet and China for discussions with Chinese officials during the period covered by this report. Additionally, five nuns were released from prison on humanitarian parole before their sentences were completed, and the number of religious practitioners detained or arrested on political grounds declined. However, the level of repression in Tibetan areas remained high and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

The "patriotic education" campaign begun in the mid-1990s officially concluded, but activities to ensure the political reliability of monks and nuns continued at a lower level of intensity. Core requirements of "patriotic education", such as the renunciation of the Dalai Lama and the acceptance of Tibet as a part of China, continue to engender resentment on the part of Tibetan Buddhists. Dozens of monks and nuns continue to serve prison terms for their resistance to "patriotic education." There were no reports of the death of religious prisoners in Tibet during the period covered by this report.

The Christian population in the TAR is extremely small. There are some reports that converts to Christianity have encountered societal pressure.

The U.S. Government continued to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas by urging the central government and local authorities to respect religious freedom and preserve religious traditions. The U.S. Government protested credible reports of religious persecution and discrimination, discussed specific cases with the authorities, and requested further information about specific incidents.

Section I. Religious Demography

The Tibetan areas of China have a total land area of 1,402,850 square miles. According to the 2000 census, the Tibetan population of those areas is 5,354,540. Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, including many government officials and some Communist Party members who practice it quietly. Increasing numbers of non-religious Han Chinese, some Han Muslims, and some Tibetan Muslims and Christians also live in the region. While

officials state that there is no Falun Gong activity in Tibet, reports indicate small numbers of practitioners among the ethnic Han population.

Chinese officials state that Tibet has 46,380 Buddhist monks and nuns and more than 1,700 monasteries, temples, and religious sites. Officials have cited almost identical figures since 1996, although the numbers of monks and nuns dropped at many sites as a result of the "patriotic education" campaign and the expulsion from monasteries and nunneries of many monks and nuns who refused to denounce the Dalai Lama or who were found to be "politically unqualified." These numbers represent only the Tibet Autonomous Region, where the number of monks and nuns is very strictly controlled; over 100,000 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns live in other Tibetan areas of China, including parts of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of religious belief and the freedom not to believe; however, the Government seeks to restrict religious practice to government-sanctioned organizations and registered places of worship and to control the growth and scope of the activity of religious groups. The Government remains suspicious of Tibetan Buddhism in general and its links to the Dalai Lama, and maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibet. Although the authorities permit many traditional religious practices and public manifestations of belief, they promptly and forcibly suppress those activities viewed as vehicles for political dissent, such as religious activities that are perceived as advocating Tibetan independence or any form of separatism. The authorities also regularly require monks and nuns to make statements overtly supporting government or party policies on religion and history, to pledge themselves to support officially approved religious leaders and reincarnations, and to denounce the Dalai Lama.

The Government's longstanding harsh rhetorical campaign against the Dalai Lama and his leadership of a "government-in-exile" was muted somewhat after Beijing authorities extended invitations to the Dalai Lama envoys to visit Tibet and other areas of China. In September 2002, Lodi Gyari and Kelsang Gyaltsen, the Dalai Lama's representatives to the United States and Europe, respectively, traveled to Beijing, Lhasa, and other cities where they met with a number of government officials. These were the first formal contacts between the Dalai Lama's representatives and the Government since 1993. Lodi Gyari made a second trip to China in May 2003 to meet with Chinese officials, and visited Beijing, Shanghai, and Yunnan provinces. Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, was also allowed to visit in July 2002, making his first trip to Tibet since he left in 1959. The Government asserts that it is open to dialogue and negotiation provided that the Dalai Lama publicly affirms that Tibet and Taiwan are inseparable parts of China.

The Government claims that since 1976 it has contributed approximately \$40 million (over 300 million RMB) toward the restoration of more than 1,400 Tibetan Buddhist sites that were destroyed before and during the Cultural Revolution. Government funding of restoration efforts was ostensibly done to support the practice of religion, but also was done in part to promote the development of tourism in Tibet. Most recent restoration efforts were funded privately, although a few religious sites also were receiving government support for reconstruction projects at the end of the period covered by this report. In June 2002, the Government began a five-year centrally funded restoration of Lhasa's Potala and Norbulingka Palaces (both former residences of the Dalai Lama) and the Sakya Monastery in rural southern Tibet (the seat of the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism).

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Buddhist monasteries and pro-independence activism are closely associated in Tibet. Since

1959, the Government has moved to curb the proliferation of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, claiming that they are a drain on local resources and a conduit for political infiltration by the Tibetan exile community. The Government states that there are no limits on the number of monks in major monasteries, and that each monastery's democratic management committee (DMC) decides on its own how many monks the monastery can support. However, since these committees are government-controlled, the authorities are able to impose strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries. The Government has the right to disapprove any individual's application to take up religious orders, although these restrictions are not always enforced.

Although monks generally are not permitted to register and formally join a monastery prior to the age of 18, many younger boys in fact continue the tradition of entering monastic life. Young novices, who traditionally served as attendants to older monks while receiving a basic monastic education and awaiting formal ordination, continue to be admitted to some Tibetan monasteries. However, many monasteries have been unable to admit and conduct classes for trainee monks due to their inability to secure government-required approval. While underage monks have been subject to expulsion from monasteries in the past, there were no reports of such expulsions during the period covered by this report.

The Government, which does not contribute to monasteries' operational funds, continued to oversee the daily operations of major monasteries and retained management control through the DMCs and the local religious affairs bureaus. In many areas, regulations restrict leadership of the DMCs to "patriotic and devoted" monks and nuns and specify that the Government must approve all members of the committees. At some major monasteries, government officials also sit on the committees.

Under the DMC system, funds no longer are made available to partially support monks engaged in full time religious study. Such "scholar monks" now must engage in income-generating activities, at least part of the time, and some experts are concerned that, as a result, fewer monks will be qualified to serve as teachers in the future. The erosion of the quality of religious teaching in the TAR continues to be a focus of concern. The quality and availability of high-level religious teachers in Tibet is inadequate; many teachers now are in exile, older teachers are not being replaced, and those remaining in other areas of China have difficulty securing permission to travel to Tibet.

Government officials state that the "patriotic education" campaign, which began in 1996, has ended. Officials acknowledge, however, that monks and nuns continue to undergo mandatory political education or "patriotic education" on a regular basis at their religious sites. Training sessions are aimed at enforcing compliance with government regulations, and either intimidating or weeding out monks and nuns who refuse to follow Party directives and who remain sympathetic to the Dalai Lama. Monks and nuns are often required to demonstrate their patriotism by signing a declaration by which they agree to: reject independence for Tibet; reject Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the 11th reincarnation of the Panchen Lama; reject and denounce the Dalai Lama; recognize the unity of China and Tibet; and vow not to listen to the Voice of America or Radio Free Asia. In the past, non-compliant monks and nuns have been expelled from religious sites, while others chose to depart rather than denounce the Dalai Lama. Because of these efforts to control the Buddhist clergy and monasteries, anti-government sentiment remains strong.

Since the early 1990s, an average of 2,500 Tibetans have entered Nepal each year seeking refugee status to escape conditions in Tibet. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 1,268 Tibetan refugees transited through Nepal in 2002. This was roughly equivalent to the 2001 level, but was about half the level seen in the late 1990s. The decline in recent years was due in part to the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. It is difficult for Tibetans to obtain official permission to travel to India for religious purposes, and some face detention or arrest upon their return to China. Nevertheless, many Tibetans, including monks and nuns, visited India via third countries and returned to Tibet after temporary stays. Recently the Chinese Government has tried to promote the return of exiled Tibetans

to China, but the approval process is cumbersome.

After the Karmapa Lama (Urgyen Trinley Dorje), the leader of Tibetan Buddhism's Karma Kargyu school and one of the most influential religious figures in Tibetan Buddhism, secretly left for India in December 1999, the authorities increased efforts to exert control over the process for identifying and educating reincarnated lamas. While the Government approved the Karmapa Lama's selection of the seventh reincarnation of Reting Rinpoche in January 2000, a controversy remains because the Dalai Lama did not recognize the selection. Another young reincarnate lama, Pawo Rinpoche, who was recognized by the Karmapa Lama in 1994, has been denied access to his religious tutors. Authorities reportedly require that he attend a regular Chinese school. During this reporting period, foreign delegations were not granted permission to visit Pawo Rinpoche's Nenang Monastery. The Government continued to insist that Gyaltzen Norbu, the boy it selected in 1995, is the Panchen Lama's 11th reincarnation. The Panchen Lama is Tibetan Buddhism's second most prominent figure, after the Dalai Lama. The Government refused to recognize the Dalai Lama's choice of another boy, Gendun Choekyi Nyima, and it tightly controlled all aspects of the "official" Panchen Lama's life. Gyaltzen Norbu (who ordinarily resides in Beijing) made a highly orchestrated visit to Tibet in June and July 2002, where he met mainly with government officials. His public appearances were marked by a heavy security presence.

Government officials maintain that possessing or displaying pictures of the Dalai Lama is not illegal. Currently, possession of pictures of the Dalai Lama appears to be on the rise, and many Tibetan Buddhists discreetly display them in private. However, possession of such pictures has triggered arrests in the past, and because a ban on these pictures is enforced sporadically, Tibetans are cautious about displaying them. Pictures of the Dalai Lama may not be purchased openly in Tibet. The Government also continued to ban pictures of Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama. The Government printed new photos of the "official" Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, in conjunction with his 2002 visit to Tibet, but they were not publicly displayed in most places.

Some 1,000 religious figures hold positions in local people's congresses and committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. However, the Government continues to insist that Communist Party members and senior government employees adhere to the Party's code of atheism, and promotes atheism in regular political training for government cadres. Government officials confirmed that all Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) officers are members of the Communist Party, and that Party members are required to be atheists. However, some lower level RAB officials practice Buddhism.

The severe restrictions on lay religious practices that were imposed in early 2000 have since been relaxed, and many religious ceremonies and festivals have been conducted with increasing openness. Tibetan New Year celebrations in March 2003 were marked by a diminished security presence, large religious ceremonies, and bonfires in the streets. Lhasa's major monasteries also held large, active prayer festivals for Monlam in March 2003 and for the Saga Dawa Festival in June 2003. However, other reports indicate that government workers were restricted by authorities from participating in religious celebrations. It is also still forbidden for monasteries to convene the traditional joint Monlam celebration, and Tibetans are prohibited from actively celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6.

Travel restrictions to and within the TAR were reported during the period covered by this report, and restrictions on issuance of passports remain in place. The Government tightly controlled visits by foreign officials to religious sites, and official foreign delegations had few opportunities to meet monks and nuns not previously approved by the local authorities.

Abbots and monks in predominantly Tibetan areas outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) report that they have greater freedom to worship and conduct religious training than their coreligionists within the TAR. Diplomats have seen pictures of a number

of exiled Tibetan religious figures, including the Dalai Lama, openly displayed in parts of Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu Provinces. During the reporting period, tensions continued surrounding the activities of the Serthar Tibetan Buddhist Institute (also known as Larung Gar), located in the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province. Beginning in June 2001, the Government ordered thousands of monks and nuns to leave the Institute, a move observers believe was motivated by its size and the influence of its charismatic founder, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog. Residences of many monks and nuns were destroyed. At its peak, the Institute housed as many as 7,000 monks and nuns, including 1,000 Han Chinese, making it the largest concentration of monks and nuns in the country. The Government stated that it was reducing the population for sanitation and hygiene regions. Critics argued that the authorities were concerned that ethnic Han Chinese students at the Institute might become sympathetic to Tibetan issues. As recently as May 2003, conflicts over attempts to rebuild some residences resulted in arrests and in the enforced closure of the Institute to outsiders. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog returned to Larung Gar in July 2002 and officials continue to monitor activities at the Institute. As of the end of the period covered by this report, the Institute's population was approximately 4,000 monks and nuns.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

The Government strictly controls access to and information about Tibetan areas, particularly the TAR, and it is difficult to determine accurately the scope of religious freedom violations. While the atmosphere for lay religious practice is less restrictive than in the recent past, the level of repression in Tibet remained high, and the Government's record of respect for religious freedom remained poor during the period covered by this report.

According to the Tibet Information Network (TIN), at least 29 monks and nuns have died while in detention in Tibet since 1987. The last such death was recorded in August 2001, when young monk Kelsang Gyatso died after a brief period of detention in Lhasa for attempting to travel to India. There were no new reports of deaths of religious prisoners during the period covered by this report.

According to statistics from the TIN, as many as 120 Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns are currently detained in China, a majority of whom are imprisoned in the TAR. In May 2002, the Deputy Director of the TAR Prison Administration Bureau stated that there are approximately 110 prisoners in Tibet incarcerated for "endangering state security." The majority of these persons are monks and nuns. As in previous years, there were reports of imprisonment and abuse and torture of monks and nuns accused of political activism, and of prisoners who were beaten because they resisted political reeducation imposed by prison authorities.

Between March and October 2002, the Chinese government granted medical parole to five nuns serving long prison terms in Tibet for protest-related activity. These were the first such early releases of Tibetan political prisoners, and one of the nuns, Ngawang Sangdrol, was subsequently allowed to leave China to seek medical attention in the United States. Four other nuns – Phuntsog Nyidrol, Jangchub Drolma, Chogdrub Drolma, and Namdrol Lhamo – reportedly remain incarcerated in Lhasa's Drapchi prison and are serving long prison terms for political offenses. In 1993, the four nuns received extended sentences for recording Tibetan independence songs in prison. Phuntsog Nyidrol, currently the longest-serving female Tibetan political prisoner, reportedly suffers from abdominal pains, frequent vomiting, and depression. Jangchub Drolma and Chongdrub Drolma were both reportedly beaten in May 1998 for refusing to sing Chinese patriotic songs at a May Day flag raising. All four are reportedly in poor health.

The Government continued to refuse to allow access to Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the boy recognized by the Dalai Lama in 1995 as the 11th Panchen Lama (when he was six years old), and his whereabouts are unknown. Government officials have claimed that the boy is under government supervision for his own protection and that he lives in Tibet and attends classes as a "normal schoolboy." All requests from the international community for access

to the boy to confirm his well-being have been refused. While the overwhelming majority of Tibetan Buddhists recognize the boy identified by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama, Tibetan monks have claimed that they were forced to sign statements pledging allegiance to the boy the Government selected. The Communist Party also urged its members to support the "official" Panchen Lama.

Chadrel Rinpoche, the lama who was accused by the Government of betraying state secrets while helping the Dalai Lama choose the incarnation of the 11th Panchen Lama, was released from prison in January 2002, according to officials. There are reports that Chadrel Rinpoche is being held under house arrest near Lhasa, but officials have not confirmed his whereabouts. They continue to state that Chadrel Rinpoche is studying scriptures in seclusion.

Following the December 1999 flight of the Karmapa Lama to India, authorities restricted access to the Tsurphu Monastery, the seat of the Karmapa Lama, and intensified "patriotic education" activities there. The Karmapa Lama stated that he left because of controls on his movements and the refusal either to allow him to go to India to be trained by his spiritual mentors or to allow his teachers to come to him. As recently as August 2002, U.S. Government visitors to Tsurphu reported few monks in residence and a tense atmosphere at the monastery. The TIN also reported that no new monks are being permitted to enter the monastery.

Although Tibetan Buddhists in Tibetan areas outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) enjoy relatively greater freedom of worship than their coreligionists within the TAR, religious expression by Tibetan Buddhists outside the TAR has also at times resulted in detention and arrest. In fall 2002, seven lay Tibetans were detained in Kardze County, Sichuan for organizing a long-life ceremony for the Dalai Lama in February 2002. The seven were ultimately tried and given sentences of 3 to 5 year imprisonment. Further, prominent religious leader Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, arrested for his alleged connection with a series of bombings in April 2002, was given a suspended death sentence at his November trial, and his former associate, Lobsang Dhundup, was sentenced to death in the same case. In December 2002, assurances were given to senior U.S. officials that both individuals would be afforded full due process given the severity of the punishment in this case. However, Lobsang Dondrub was executed in January 2003, on the same day as his appeal, despite never having received the promised review by the Supreme People's Court. Chinese officials maintained that the sentence was applied and carried out for "sabotage of the unity of the country" and "unity of various ethnic groups" and for "crimes of terror." Several other monks were arrested or detained in connection with their support for Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche.

Since Falun Gong was banned in July 1999, there have been reports of detentions of Falun Gong practitioners in Tibet, and at least one Falun Gong adherent was reportedly detained in Tibet during the period covered by this report. The number of Falun Gong practitioners in Tibet is believed to be small.

Forced Religious Conversion

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

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Most Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism. The Christian population in Tibet is extremely small. There are some reports that converts to Christianity have encountered societal pressure, and some converts have reportedly been disinherited by their families.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu made a concerted effort to encourage greater religious freedom in Tibetan areas. In regular exchanges with the Government, including with religious affairs officials, U.S. diplomatic personnel consistently urged both central government and local authorities to respect religious freedom in Tibetan areas. Embassy and consulate officials protested and sought further information on cases whenever there were credible reports of religious persecution or discrimination. Since January 2002, Chinese authorities have released seven ethnic Tibetan prisoners of conscience who were the subject of U.S. Government concern. U.S. diplomatic personnel stationed in the country also regularly traveled to The TAR and other Tibetan areas to monitor conditions, including the status of religious freedom. Senior U.S. officials traveled to China several times during the period covered by this report to raise human rights concerns, including religious freedom in Tibet. U.S. officials maintain contacts with a wide spectrum of religious figures, and the U.S. Department of State's nongovernmental contacts include experts on religion in Tibetan areas and religious groups in the United States.

A round of the ongoing U.S.-China bilateral human rights dialogue was held in December 2002, and religious freedom in Tibet was an agenda item.

