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Russia

International Religious Freedom Report 2003

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on some 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 this provision.

There was no change in the over-all status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion; however, 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," which seriously disadvantages religious groups new to the country, eased during the period covered by this report. However, there were indications that the security services were increasingly treating the leadership of some minority religious groups as security threats.

Religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens, although many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is at the heart of what it means to be Russian. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as societal hostility toward Catholics and newer, non-Orthodox, religions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it often is difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and religions new to the country. Leaders in the Russian Orthodox Church have stated publicly their opposition to the presence of Catholics, Protestants, and newer religions in the country.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of approximately 6.5 million square miles and its population is approximately 144 million.

There are no reliable statistics that break down the population by denomination. Available information suggests that slightly more than half of the inhabitants consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians, although the vast majority of those are not regular churchgoers. There are some 16 to 20 million Muslims, constituting approximately 14 percent of the population and forming the largest religious minority. Muslims live predominantly in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, the northern Caucasus, and the Volga region. By most estimates, Protestants constitute the third largest group of believers. An estimated 600,000 to 1 million Jews remain in the country (0.5 percent of the total population) following large-scale emigration over the last 2 decades. Approximately 80 percent of Jews live in Moscow or St. Petersburg. The so-called Jewish Autonomous Oblast, located in the Far East, contains between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews.

Buddhism is traditional to three of the country's regions: Buryatiya, Tuva, and Kalmykiya. In some areas, such as Yakutia and Chukotka, pantheistic and nature-based religions are practiced independently or alongside majority religions.

According to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), there were 21,448 registered religious organizations as of January 1. The figures show an increase of approximately 1,000 registered organizations since 2002 and over 5,000 since 1997. The MOJ recorded the number of registered religious groups as follows: Russian Orthodox Church—11,299 groups, Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church—42, Russian Orthodox Church Abroad—41, True Orthodox Church—52, Russian Orthodox Free Church—18, Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate)—9, Old Believers—288 (divided among 4 separate groups), Roman Catholic—268, Greek Catholic—4, Armenian Apostolic—61, Muslim—3467, Buddhist—218, Jewish—270 (divided among Orthodox and Reform groups), Baptist—1,015, Pentecostal—1,435, Seventh-day Adventist—643, other evangelical and charismatic groups—134, Lutheran—211 (divided among 4 separate groups), Apostolic—83, Methodist—104, Reformist—5, Presbyterian—140, Anglican—1, Jehovah's Witnesses—407, Mennonite—8, Salvation Army—8, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)—47, Unification Church—10, Church of the "Sovereign" Icon of the Mother of God—29, Molokane—29, Dukhobor—1, Church of the Last Covenant—16, Church of Christ—24, Judaizing Christian—2, non-denominational Christian—41, Scientologist—1, Hindu—1, Krishna—97, Baha'i—20, Tantric—3, Taoist—9, Assyrian—2, Sikh—1, Coptic—1, Shamanist—11, Karaite—2, Zoroastrian—1, Spiritual Unity (Tolstoyan)—1, Living Ethic (Rerikhian)—1, pagan—19, other confessions—240.

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. An estimated 500 (official estimate) to more than 9,000 (Council of Mufti estimate) Muslim organizations remain unregistered; some reportedly are defunct, but many, according to the council of Muftis, have concluded that they did not require legal status and have postponed applying to register for financial reasons. The registration figures probably also underestimate the number of Pentecostal believers. New Pentecostal organizations are forming rapidly, and unofficial estimates suggest that there are between 1,500 and 2,000 Pentecostal congregations nationwide, many of which remain unregistered despite their efforts. Some religious groups have registered as social organizations because they are unable to register as religious organizations. The Unification Church reports that the drop in registered organizations from 17 last year to 10 this year is an administrative hitch rather than a real decrease. The same may be true for other groups. The Head of the department for registration of religious organizations for the MOJ reported that although there are Quakers' and Christian Scientists' groups in Russia, they are listed as having no registered religious organizations because they chose not to reregister. Contrary, however, to this information, the Quakers administer one registered religious organization in Moscow. According to the law, they are allowed to operate without being reregistered.

In practice, only a small minority of citizens identify strongly with any religion. Many who identify themselves as members of a faith participate in religious life only rarely or not at all. For example, while an estimated 64 percent of respondents to a 2000 Public Opinion Foundation poll identified themselves as members of a particular faith, only 19 percent said that they visited a place of worship more than once or twice a year (many Orthodox believers attend church only on Christmas or Easter). An estimated 11 percent of respondents said that they observed Lent or other fasts. Only 4 percent of respondents stated that they took communion more than once or twice a year (in the Orthodox tradition, taking communion requires personal preparation by fasting, confession, and prayer).

A large number of foreign missionaries operate in the country, many from Protestant denominations.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, in some cases the authorities imposed restrictions on some 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 law on freedom of religion was adopted in 1990 by the Russian Federation's Supreme Court and remained the same until a new law was adopted in 1997. The 1990 law declared all religions equal before the law, prohibited government interference in religion, and established simple registration procedures for religious groups. Registration of religious groups was not required, but groups could obtain a number of advantages by registering, such as the ability to establish official places of worship or benefit from tax exemptions. The 1990 law helped facilitate a revival of religious activity. In 1997 a supplemental law on religion was passed: The Law on Freedom of Conscience. Although the 1997 law does not recognize a state religion, its preamble identifies Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism as "traditional religions" and recognizes the "special contribution of Orthodoxy to the history of Russia and to the establishment and development of Russia's spirituality and culture."

Neither the Constitution nor the 1997 law accords explicit privileges or advantages to "traditional religions;" however, many politicians and public figures argue for closer cooperation with them, above all with the Russian Orthodox Church's Moscow Patriarchate. The Russian Orthodox Church has entered into a number of agreements, some formal, others informal, with government ministries on such matters as guidelines for public education, religious training for military personnel, and law enforcement and customs decisions, giving the Russian Orthodox Church special access to institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the police, the FSB, and the army.

Many government officials, along with other citizens, equate Russian Orthodoxy with Russian nationhood. This belief appears to have manifested itself in a church-state relationship. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church 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, Interior, and other bodies, such as Emergency Situations, Tax, Federal Border Service, and Main Department of Cossack Forces under the President. The details of these agreements are far from transparent, but available information indicates that the Russian Orthodox Church appears to receive more favorable treatment than other denominations. Public statements by some government officials and anecdotal evidence from religious minority groups suggest that the Russian Orthodox Church, increasingly since 1999, has enjoyed a status that approaches official. Election campaign teams often include members of the Russian Orthodox clergy. The clergy also frequently plays a special role at official events at both the local and national level. Nonetheless, policymakers remain divided on the State's proper relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church and other churches. The 1997 law ostensibly targeted so-called "totalitarian sects" or dangerous religious "cults." The intent of some of the law's sponsors, however, appears to have been to discriminate against members of foreign and less well-known religions by making it difficult for them to establish religious organizations in the country. For example, many officials in law enforcement and the legislative branches speak of the need to protect 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. It creates various categories of religious communities with differing 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, or conduct worship services in prisons and state-owned hospitals and among the armed forces. It does not enjoy tax benefits or the right to proselytize. Individual members of the group may buy property for the group's use, invite personal guests to engage in religious instruction, and import religious material. In this way, groups theoretically are permitted to rent public spaces and hold services. However, in practice members of unregistered groups sometimes encounter significant difficulty in exercising these rights.

The 1997 law provides that a group that has existed for 15 years and has at least 10 Russian members may register as a "local organization." It acquires the status of a juridical person and thus receives certain legal advantages. A group with three functioning local organizations in different regions may found a "centralized organization." A centralized organization has the right to establish affiliated local organizations without adhering to the 15-year rule.

In 1999 the Constitutional Court upheld the 15-year provision; however, it declared that the rule did not apply to organizations that were registered before the passage of the 1997 law. For example, the 15-year rule no longer prevented the registration of newly created local Jehovah's

Witnesses religious organizations because they were registered at the time of implementation of the 1997 law.

Nonetheless the 1999 ruling does not support the registration of newer denominations unless they were registered before the passage of the 1997 law or affiliate themselves with existing centralized organizations. For example, in August 2001, the Church of Scientology filed an application with the European Court of Human Rights to protest the denial of registration to a chapter in Surgut, Tyumen Oblast. The authorities denied the chapter registration as a social organization, then denied it registration as a non-profit organization, and finally denied it registration as a religious organization based on the 15-year rule.

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

Under a 1999 amendment to the law, groups that failed to reregister became subject to legal "liquidation," i.e., deprivation of juridical status. By the deadline for registration, December 31, 2000, an estimated 2,095 religious groups were subject to liquidation, and the MOJ reported that by May 2002, approximately 980 of them had been liquidated. The Ministry asserted that most liquidated organizations were defunct, but religious minorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contended that a significant number were active. Complaints of involuntary liquidation have decreased in recent years.

The 1997 law also gives officials the authority to ban religious groups. Unlike liquidation, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits the activities of an entire religious community. As with liquidation, complaints of bans against legitimate groups have been decreasing. Working groups within the Government continued to focus on introducing possible amendments to the controversial 1997 law. Duma Deputy Aleksandr Chuyev is one of several officials who have proposed legislative changes to formally grant special status to the country's "traditional" religious denominations. No new changes were implemented during the period covered by this report. In March, newspapers reported the formation of a religious lobby called "In Support of Traditional Spiritual and Moral Values," with deputies representing the four "traditional" religions in the country (Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism).

On May 15, the Supreme Court reversed its own earlier decision and ruled in favor of a group of Muslim women from Tatarstan who had sought the right to wear headscarves in photos taken for official documents.

Officials of the Presidential Administration, regions, and localities have established 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 interact with a special department within the Presidential Administration's Directorate for Domestic Policy, entitled the Presidential Council on Cooperation with Religious Organizations. The broad-based Council is composed of members of the Presidential Administration, secular academics who are specialists on religious affairs, and representatives of both majority and minority faiths.

Discussion continued during the period covered by this report on the efficacy of creating a government ministry or organ for religious affairs. Many religious organizations emphasized that such an institution would be unwelcome if it emulated its Soviet predecessor's repressive activities. Others, including some minority religious groups, believe that such a body could ensure equal treatment for all faiths under the law.

Interest in establishing a government ministry or organ for religious affairs may have been prompted in part by a view held by a number of government officials, particularly in the security services, that foreign religious groups, particularly Muslims, but also Catholics, some Protestant groups, and a number of religious groups relatively new to the country, constituted security threats that required greater monitoring and possibly greater control. In December, accounts of a draft report on religious extremism prepared by a working group under the supervision of Nationalities Minister Vladimir Zorin and Chechen administration head Akhmat Kadyrov

appeared in the press. The draft, as leaked to the press, focused primarily on radical Islam and included concerns about a "clash of civilizations" between Christians and Muslims. It also mentioned a sharp increase in religious groups in general, and asserted that their activity constituted a security threat. There was specific mention of Roman Catholics, whose activities were causing "tension," and of Jehovah's Witnesses. The draft report recommended a federal body to manage ethnic and state-religious relations, including stricter sentences for individuals inciting religious, as well as ethnic and racial hatred. Minister Zorin himself denied that the report had any official status and there was no indication at the end of the period covered by this report that any version of it had received official approval. Nonetheless, it appeared to reflect the types of concerns that prompted government actions in a number of visa and registration cases.

In June, a news service in Bashkortostan reported that the chief federal inspector and the deputy chief of the republic's FSB held a public meeting on security issues. During the meeting, the officials reportedly warned that non-traditional religions are used by foreign organizations to undermine the country's security. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the True Orthodox Church, the New Apostle Church, Aum Shinrikyo, and Satanists were named as dangerous sects. In September, Secretary Rushaylo of the Russian Security Council accused non-traditional religious confessions of acting at times beyond the limits of the law, calling for adequate responses by law enforcement structures.

Contradictions between federal and local laws, and varying interpretations of the law, provide regional officials with opportunities to restrict the activities of religious minorities. Many observers attribute discriminatory practices to the greater susceptibility of local governments to discriminatory attitudes and lobbying by local majority religions. There were isolated instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in the public discussion of their religious views, but usually these instances were resolved quickly. President Vladimir Putin's articulated desire for greater centralization of power and strengthening the rule of law has led to some improvements in the area of religious freedom in the regions. The federal Government works through the Procuracy, Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and the courts to force regions to comply with federal law. The Government often is active in preventing or reversing discrimination at the local level.

The country's legal code includes strong hate-crime laws. In addition, an anti-extremism bill was adopted on July 25, with the goal of reducing religious and ethnic intolerance and limiting the activities of ultra-right-wing parties and organizations. The legislation prohibits advocating the superiority of any group based on religion, race, nationality, language, or other attributes in public speech. However, critics charged that the legislation could prompt a dangerous expansion of police power and that the Government had already demonstrated a lack of political will in fulfilling the potential of existing legislation (such as Article 282 of the Criminal Code). Some observers expressed particular concern about the effect of the legislation on religious freedom. In at least one region, Samara, authorities subsequently made use of the legislation to cancel the registration of a Buddhist community and the Church of the Last Covenant and to refuse registration to communities of Scientologists and the Unification Church. In the vast majority of crimes targeting Jewish organizations and property, officials generally ignore the anti-Semitic components of the crimes and prosecute criminals under the much more lenient charge of "hooliganism."

Article 282 of the Criminal Code governs cases of incitement to national, racial, or religious hatred. According to the Procuracy General, as of November 1, 2001, the authorities had opened 37 cases pursuant to Article 282. As of July 1, 2002, according to the statistical department of the Supreme Court, the Procuracy had brought five such cases to court, but none of the accused was convicted. NGO reports indicate that over the course of 2002, the authorities opened 71 such cases in Russian courts and 32 individuals were sentenced. In 1999, there had been only four such cases.

A November "Law on Foreigners," which transferred much of the responsibility for visa affairs from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of the Interior, appears to have disrupted the visa regime for religious and other foreign workers, and possibly contributed to the sharp decrease in the issuance of long-term visas. Though not a universal occurrence or official policy, many religious workers received three-month visas (even if they had previously held visas with one year validity). The curtailed validity has led religious groups to begin shuttling their missionaries in and out of the country every three months. Officials in the Duma, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and MOJ have stated that the changes in visa validity are a result of administrative adjustments due to the new regulations. Some have asserted that the issuance of

three-month visas is a temporary situation.

The State does not require religious instruction in schools, although in some regions the Russian Orthodox Church uses public buildings after hours to provide religious instruction to pupils on a voluntary basis. In the spring of 2002, the Pokrov publishing house began issuing 10,000 copies of the pro-Orthodox textbook "Foundations of Orthodox Culture" for use in public schools. The course is optional, but only a small percentage of non-Orthodox parents choose to keep their children out of the course. In some regions, public schools taught the subject for several years before the introduction of the latest textbook. Disputes over language against non-Orthodox, particularly Jews, continue, though attempts to bring legal suits against the authors and publisher have been unsuccessful. The authors have stated their readiness to delete negative references to Jews in subsequent editions of the textbook.

In January 2002, at the Tenth International Christmas Readings held in the Kremlin, Education Minister Vladimir Filippov cited a 2000 policy document that obliges the Government to "ensure the spirituality and morality of the coming generation." In the same year, the Ministry of Education addressed a note to heads of educational institutions warning against the penetration of non-traditional religions into the country.

The Constitution mandates the availability of alternative military service to those who refuse to bear arms for religious or other reasons of conscience. The legal foundation for such an alternative came into force on July 25 with the passage of a federal law on alternative civilian service. Length of service was set at 42 months (1.75 times longer than regular military service). Human rights groups have complained that the extended length of service in essence acts as a punishment for those who choose to exercise their religious or moral convictions. The law is scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2004, but human rights activists report that prosecutions for avoiding service have declined already under the influence of the legislation. The head of the draft board in Surgut reports that conscripts increasingly refuse to go into military service because of their convictions, and that actual call-ups are being delayed until the law comes into force. The Government also passed regulations on January 23 granting draft postponement to members of the clergy. The regulations established a quota of 300 members of the clergy in 2002, to be distributed among different religious organizations by the Commission on Religious Associations of the Government of the Russian Federation.

The authorities permit Orthodox chapels and priests on army bases. They give some Protestant groups access to military facilities on a more limited basis; however, Islamic services are banned, and Muslim conscripts are not given alternatives to pork-based meals or time to say daily prayers.

The office of federal Human Rights Ombudsman Oleg Mironov contains a department dedicated to religious freedom issues, which receives and responds to complaints from individuals and groups about infringements of religious freedom. Mironov has recommended changes to bring the country's legislation into accordance with international standards and the Constitution. He has also criticized local laws, such as legislation passed in Belgorod restricting the activities of local missionaries, and attempted to bring them into line with federal standards. In some regions there also are local human rights ombudsmen with a mandate to address religious freedom issues.

Other avenues for interaction with regional and local authorities also exist. The administrative structures of at least some of the offices of the seven Plenipotentiary Presidential District Representatives (polpreds) include offices that address social and religious issues. Regional administrations and many municipal administrations also have designated officials responsible for acting as a liaison with religious organizations; however, it is at the regional and municipal 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 implementing the law properly. The academy opens up many of its conferences to international audiences.

In 2001 the Government adopted a tolerance program with a yearly allotment of \$806,452 (25 million rubles) to cover the period 2001—2005. The original plan called for a large number of interagency measures, such as the review of federal and regional legislation on extremism, mandatory training for public officials on how to promote ethnic and religious tolerance, and new educational materials for use in public educational institutions. An interagency commission

headed by the Ministry of Education guides the plan, which began in 2001 and focused mainly on establishing monitoring mechanisms and pilot projects on college campuses. During this period, provincial authorities launched 170 study programs and developed 200 educational guides in such locations as the Republic of Kareliya and Udmurtiya, and Rostov and Tomsk Oblasts. Implementation of the plan was sporadic. Nevertheless, at least one NGO was able to work in parallel with the program (in 2001-2002), participating in training law enforcement and other government officials (both local and federal) in promoting tolerance. The Saint Petersburg NGO Harold and Selma Light Center, in conjunction with a foreign-based NGO, conducted successful programs in Petrozavodsk, Ryazan, and Kazan. In February 2003, the Ministry of Education announced a competition for higher education institutions to develop research projects on tolerance. Also in Moscow, city authorities reportedly made an allotment to local tolerance initiatives as part of the federal program.

Officials under the President of Kalmykia met with the republic's head Buddhist and Orthodox bishop on April 1 to discuss concerns about alternative schools of Buddhism and the increasing numbers of Adventists, Baptists, and Pentecostals in the republic. Since 1993, officials have encouraged a revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia, along with state subsidies for building Buddhist temples and training monks. Despite this support, officials state that Buddhism is not the state religion in Kalmykia.

The local government in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the strongest Islamic areas of Russia, continued to encourage a Tatar cultural and religious revival but avoided instituting confrontational religious policies. Since the breakup of the USSR, the Tatarstan government has funded the construction of some 1,000 mosques and several dozen Islamic schools.

The regions of Kabardino-Balkariya and Dagestan have laws banning extremist religious activities, described as "Wahhabism," but there were no reports that authorities invoked these laws to deny Muslim groups registration.

On June 25, President Putin stated publicly that secular authorities would do everything in their power to help improve relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican. Some of the country's highest-level officials attended the Orthodox Christmas service at Christ the Savior Cathedral.

The President, who has openly spoken of his belief in God, acknowledged Orthodox Easter, Rosh Hashanah, Ramadan, and the Buddhist New Year with greetings to representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities, respectively. Orthodox Christmas, January 7, is observed as a national holiday.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Critics continue to identify several aspects of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience as providing a basis for actions that restrict religious freedom. They criticize in particular the provisions allowing the State to ban religious organizations, requiring organizations to reregister, and establishing procedures for their liquidation. Critics also cite provisions that not only limit the rights of religious "groups," but also require that religious groups exist for 15 years before they can qualify for "organization" status. Although the situation is somewhat better for groups that were registered before 1997, groups new to the country are hindered in their ability to practice their faith. The federal Government has attempted to apply the 1997 law liberally and critics direct most of their allegations of restrictive practices at local officials. Implementation of the 1997 law varies widely in the regions, depending on the attitude of local offices of the Ministry of Justice (responsible for registration, liquidation, and bans).

Under the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience, the Government may seek to ban a religious organization deemed a threat to society. Unlike liquidation, which involves only the loss of an organization's juridical status, a ban prohibits the activities of an entire religious community. Banning proceedings require judicial review. The Procuracy of Moscow's Northern Circuit continued its efforts to ban the local organization of Jehovah's Witnesses on the grounds that it was a threat to society, a basis for banning a religious organization under the 1997 law. The initial suit was dismissed in February 2001, but a retrial opened at the higher Golovinskiy Municipal Court in October 2001. On May 22, the retrial was adjourned pending the completion of an expert study to assess physiological and linguistic aspects of Jehovah's Witness teachings. This was the fourth expert study ordered in the ongoing trial. A previous expert study,

ordered in April 2002, delayed the court case for ten months. Human rights organizations, including the Council of Europe's Monitoring Committee, protested the extraordinary length of the trial and called for its resolution. City officials cited the trial as justification for withholding registration. Lawyers for the Jehovah's Witnesses organization appealed to the European Court for Human Rights, which in turn questioned the Government and requested a response by September 16, 2003. The Moscow community remains operational, although it experienced continuing difficulties in finding venues for religious services.

The 1997 law required all religious organizations previously registered under the more liberal 1990 law to reregister by December 31, 2000. In practice this process, which involves simultaneous registration at both the federal and local levels, requires 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 philosophical conviction, and according to spokespersons for the country's two most prominent muftis, some Muslim groups decided that they would not benefit from reregistering.

Local officials, reportedly sometimes influenced by close relations with local Russian Orthodox Church authorities, either refused outright to register groups or created prohibitive obstacles to registration. A lack of specific guidelines to accompany the 1997 law and the shortage of knowledgeable local officials contributed to the problem. There are indications that the Procurator General encouraged local prosecutors to challenge the registration of some non-traditional religious groups.

According to spokespersons, authorities permitted registration of Jehovah's Witnesses in 399 communities, but problems with registration continue in several communities. On December 12, 2000, the Moscow Community of Jehovah's Witnesses filed with the Justice Department, its fifth and final application for re-registration. When the application was dismissed on January 12, 2001, the Jehovah's Witnesses filed claims to secure re-registration in the courts of the City of Moscow. Twice during the period covered by this report the Moscow City Court denied registration applications by Jehovah's Witnesses, most recently on February 20. The trials for the cases continued in the Presnensky, Kuzminskiy, and Butyrskiy District Courts. In the Presnensky Court, the civil chamber of the Moscow City Court dismissed the appeal on December 2. The Kuzminsky District Court ruled the request for supervisory review must be re-filed under a new procedure, which the attorneys did on April 25, and were still awaiting word. In the Butyrskiy District Court, the judge denied leave for a supervisory review on March 3. On May 30, the attorneys for the Jehovah's Witnesses filed a request with Moscow City Court Chairman Yegorova seeking reconsideration of the judge's ruling (this is prerequisite to any further supervisory appeal in the Russian Supreme Court). The Jehovah's Witnesses organization reports Witnesses have been denied registration in Tver and in Cheboksary, a city in Chuvashiya. In November, a court in Chelyabinsk ruled that the authorities' refusal to register the group was illegal, allowing the group to register successfully on April 7.

The Mormons have succeeded in registering more than 45 local religious organizations as of June 30; however, in several regions local officials impeded registration. For example, the Mormons have attempted unsuccessfully to register a local religious organization in Kazan, Tatarstan, since 1998. The local Department of Justice in Chelyabinsk continues to reject the local Mormons' registration application, alleging that Mormon activities are incompatible with federal law. The Mormons have been denied registration in Ryazan and Shakhtiy, but officials registered them in Khabarovsk and Nakhodka.

Although media, NGO reports, and government officials had reported that many local Muslim religious organizations were unable to reregister before the December 31, 2000 deadline, spokespersons for the country's two most prominent muftis stated that most Muslim religious organizations that wanted to register were able to do so. In the remaining cases, procedural irregularities and mutual accusations of "Wahhabism" by the two principal Muslim groups appear to have hindered reregistration efforts by Muslim organizations. The term "Wahhabi," referring to a branch of Sunni Islam, has become pejorative because of persistent allegations that "Wahhabism" was to blame for terrorist attacks linked to the war in Chechnya.

In Samara, authorities made use of anti-extremism legislation passed in July to cancel the registration of a Buddhist community and the Church of the Last Covenant. Communities of Scientologists and the Unification Church also were refused registration in Samara because of the legislation.

An amendment to the 1997 law requires the MOJ to seek the liquidation of groups that fail to register. In February 2002, the Constitutional Court ruled that the Moscow City Court had acted improperly in liquidating the local branch of the Salvation Army, since that group had made repeated and timely attempts to reregister under the 1997 law. The Taganskiy District Court subsequently issued a decision against liquidation of the Moscow branch of the Salvation Army, which was supported in a decision by the Moscow City Court on March 16. Despite these favorable rulings, the MDJ had not reregistered the organization by the end of the period covered by this report. The Moscow organization continues to operate on a limited basis, but has experienced difficulties in purchasing a meeting space.

The Moscow branch of the Church of Scientology has not been permitted by the Moscow authorities to reregister and was threatened with liquidation. The Scientologists filed a suit with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) against the liquidation order and has continued to avoid liquidation. The Scientologists countered the MDJ contention that the Church had failed to reregister by the deadline by citing the 2002 Constitutional Court ruling in favor of the Salvation Army, stating that the group had tried repeatedly to re-register, and, therefore, could not be liquidated. Despite the court ruling against liquidation, local authorities denied registration to the St. Petersburg branch of the Church of Scientology four times during the period covered by this report. Local authorities also continued to impede the operation of Scientology centers in Dmitrograd, Izhevsk, and other localities, but the Supreme Court returned for retrial a liquidation order against the Khabarovsk Dianetics Center filed by the local Department of Justice which the Church of Scientology had lost on appeal. In a related case, the Director of the Khabarovsk Dianetics Center was convicted on criminal charges of the illegal practice of medicine and education. She lost on appeal and was given a suspended sentence of 6 years. Since she had been found guilty, the public prosecutor of the city of Khabarovsk filed a suit for liquidation of the Center, as the Center was allegedly involved in illegal activity. The statement of claim for liquidation was based entirely on expert opinions from criminal cases, i.e. imputing medical and educational activities to the Center. On September 25, 2002, the court approved the claim for liquidation of the Dianetics Center, and the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation upheld the judgment of the trial court. Local media attention included references to "totalitarian sects" in their coverage. The Scientologists also have several groups that are registered as social organizations because they were unable to register them as religious organizations.

On March 21, a regional court in Primorskiy Kray approved the liquidation of the "Faith in Action" Bible College in Vladivostok. The prosecutor's office accused the college of conducting religious education without a license, though lawyers for the school argued there was no basis to the accusations as long as the school did not issue diplomas or certificates. Administrators at the school reported burdensome regulatory demands by fire and sanitation officials. On May 20, the Supreme Court upheld the ruling in favor of liquidation.

On January 28, a regional court in Kostroma Oblast dropped charges of brainwashing against the Family of God Pentecostal community and dismissed an order for liquidation that had been ongoing since 2000. Despite the resolution of the court case, officials continue to make frequent visits to the community and request information about its activities and finances. The community has been forced to change location three times since 2002. Articles attacking the church appeared periodically in the local press during the period covered by this report.

While many of the restrictions on religious freedom are associated with the 1997 law, there were other unrelated restrictions enacted at the local level.

Some local governments prevented religious groups from using venues suitable for large gatherings such as cinemas and government facilities. Mormons encountered difficulty obtaining permission to build and then occupy an assembly hall in Volgograd. In March, a 300-strong unregistered Baptist community was unexpectedly informed they could no longer rent premises at a public library in Moscow where they have met for the last six years.

A hearing was scheduled for August on the right of Jehovah's Witnesses in Yuzhno Sakhalinsk to make use of a new worship hall they had constructed. On December 3, 2002, a city court cancelled the mayor's permit authorizing their use of the land; on April 8, a higher court reversed the decision, but the mayor's office then preempted the decision by canceling its original permit. In a separate attempt to prevent occupation of the building, local citizens in Yuzhno Sakhalinsk initiated a law suit asking the city not to register the Jehovah's Witnesses' property title. The court dismissed the case on June 24, but the authorities appealed to a higher court. In the course of these developments, the Jehovah's Witnesses organization was fined approximately

\$645(19,855 rubles) for holding meetings in the building without the mayor's permit. The authorities also cut off electricity to the building temporarily. The polemic reportedly has attracted extensive hostile media attention and prompted local citizens to establish an "anti-cult" social organization.

In Khabarovsk, Jehovah's Witnesses purchased a building, but the authorities refused to register the title despite three court orders. Lawyers continue to challenge the local Department of Justice's refusal to register the title, but no date has been set for the latest hearing. The building is in danger of being sold to a different buyer.

The Moscow city authorities gave Hare Krishna leaders a deadline of September to vacate their premises. The Krishnaites possess a 2.5-acre empty lot but have not been given permission to rent temporary quarters until they can build a new center. Krishnaites have been renting a camp outside of Moscow for the past ten years that houses a number of families and a temple. Officials demanded that the community buy the property and reportedly posted guards at the camp to review the comings and goings of its residents.

A "temporary ban" remains in effect on construction of a Catholic Church in Pskov. City authorities reportedly imposed the ban after objections by the archbishop of the local Russian Orthodox Church. Opponents of the church's construction argued that the church was too large, infringing on the city's historic center, and that the belfry was too prominent. The local parish had submitted blueprints for the church and received the permits required by law before beginning construction. Permission for construction to go forward was granted on September 17, 2002, but construction halted again in April. Local officials said that the church leadership had yet to provide required documentation to permit construction to resume and that once this obstacle was overcome they were confident that the project would go forward. Catholics also have been unable to obtain final approval from the mayor's office for construction of a church in the historical center of Yaroslavl. The land adjoins a building that housed a pre-Revolutionary Catholic chapel. In July, approval was withheld unexpectedly.

The Russian Orthodox Church in some cases continues to enjoy a close ceremonial relationship with government officials. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this close church-state relationship sometimes extends beyond purely ceremonial roles. For example, in early 2002, the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) received Patriarch Aleksey at the Service's Lubyanka headquarters, where the prelate blessed a church that had been restored. In public statements on that occasion, both figures spoke of the need to defend the country's spiritual security against "sects" and "cults."

Tensions between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican, which increased during the reporting period, often involved the Government of Russia. In 2002, after the Russian Orthodox Church vehemently protested the decision by the Vatican to upgrade its four existing apostolic administrations to dioceses, the Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling upon the Vatican to refrain from such a move and "to settle the matter with the Russian Orthodox Church." The Russian Orthodox Church denied involvement in the subsequent cancellation of the visas of five Catholic priests, including one bishop, but heatedly defended the cancellations as a state prerogative and an appropriate response to Catholic "encroachment." In April 2002, Duma deputy Viktor Alksnis submitted a draft resolution calling upon the President to direct the Justice Ministry and its local departments to pursue the legal ban of the Catholic Church's four dioceses. The following month, the Duma failed to pass the resolution with the necessary 226 votes, with 169 lawmakers voting in favor, 37 against, and 4 abstaining.

Human rights groups and religious minority groups have criticized the Procurator General for encouraging legal action against some minority religions and for giving an imprimatur of authority to materials that are biased against Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and others. The FSB, the Procurator, and other official agencies have conducted campaigns of harassment against Catholics, some Protestant groups, and newer religious movements. Churches faced investigations for purported criminal activity, landlords were pressured to renege on contracts, and in some cases the security services are thought to have influenced the MOJ to reject registration applications. For example, in March 2002, Pastor Martinez of the Kingdom of God church in Moscow reported that two persons dressed as police officers and ten in civilian clothing broke down the doors of the church, disrupting a worship service. They conducted a documents check and seized a medicine cabinet in what they described as a search for narcotics. The President of the Mormon organization in the Russian Far East reported several instances in which law enforcement officials visited Church meetings and asked questions about

the activities of missionaries.

In September, the MOJ registered a new political party, the National Power Party of Russia (NDPR), which is openly anti-Semitic. The party's co-chairman, Boris Mironov, was ousted from his government post of press minister in 1994 for making anti-Semitic comments, and the party's senior executive, Viktor Korchagin, has been prosecuted repeatedly for kindling nationalist discord. On May 20, the MOJ revoked the party's registration based on a technicality. More mainstream politicians also made anti-Semitic comments in the press, such as Duma Deputy and leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation Gennadiy Zyuganov. Communist Duma deputy Vasily Shandybin has often made derogatory public references to Jews. Krasnodar Governor Aleksandr Tkachev claimed in public that there was a Zionist plot in his province, although very few Jews live there (in spite of this statement, he has also promised to help the Jewish community with their efforts to build a synagogue in Krasnodar). Anti-Semitic themes also figure in local election campaigns. In the summer of 2002, in Dzerzhinsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Vladimir Brikker faced a tide of anti-Semitic propaganda in the final week of a tight race for mayor.

Pentecostal representatives reported that the head of the Khabarovsk administration's Department of Religion continued to engage in a campaign of harassment, hindering the church's registration efforts and imposing extensive bureaucratic requirements on visiting missionaries. Harassment by officials included an organized roundtable to discuss the negative effects of the religion. In addition, the local church was vandalized. The Victory Chapel congregation, which is affiliated with a centrally registered Pentecostal organization, is among the Protestant churches denied registration in the region. The local Russian Orthodox bishop submitted comments to an article in the Telemir newspaper in March identifying Baptists, Adventists, and Pentecostals as sects and urging the authorities to clean Sakhalin of the influence of sects. The main article also suggested that the Victory Chapel engaged in destructive practices such as hypnotism, estranging members from their families, and plundering members' finances.

In May, official attention to the Moscow-based Buddhist community "Rinchen Ling" increased. According to the Slavic Center for Law and Justice, representatives of security, tax, and passport control services carried out frequent visits to a location where the community was preparing for an annual summer seminar. Earlier in the year, representatives from the city architect's office and the fire and sanitation services also visited the camp. From May 20 into the month of June, electric power to the camp was switched off. In previous years, the summer seminar had not attracted the attention of authorities.

In 2001, local legislators in the Belgorod region passed a law restricting missionary activity, including the use of venues in which religious meetings may be held. Foreigners visiting the region are forbidden to engage in missionary activity or to preach unless specifically allowed to do so according to their visas (some groups reportedly sent religious workers on business or tourist visas in order not to alert the authorities to their activities). In December 2001, the Supreme Court rejected the Belgorod local procurator's challenge to the law. In August 2001, the Belgorod regional court ruled to strike one article of the law that stated that groups receiving repeated violations would be banned. No information was available concerning any attempts to enforce this law by the end of the period covered by this report.

A Catholic parish in Magadan, run by Father Michael Shields, came under continued threat of liquidation by local authorities. In March 2002, Father Shields won his court case that challenged the legality of his nomination as priest of the local Catholic parish on the grounds that he is a foreign citizen, and his parish avoided liquidation, but at the end of the reporting period, the new Magadan cathedral remained unconsecrated in symbolic recognition of Bishop Mazur's absence, despite the arrival of the new Bishop, Kirill Klimovich.

Foreign religious workers without residency permits typically must go abroad once a year to renew their visas; some receive multiple-entry visas or are able to extend their stays. Since the enactment of a new "Law on Foreigners" and subsequent amendments starting in November, religious workers report difficulty obtaining visas with terms longer than 3 months. The authorities denied Catholic priest Bronislaw Czaplicki, who had worked in the country for 11 years, an extension of his residency permit in February. He returned to St. Petersburg in May after being issued a 3-month visa.

Some religious personnel experienced visa and customs difficulties while entering or leaving the country. It is so difficult to get a religious visa that some foreign workers feel they have little choice but to conceal the true purpose of their visit. That, in turn, leaves them open to accusations that they have misrepresented the purpose of their travel and therefore do not deserve another visa. Others had difficulties registering their visas with the local authorities, as required by law. For example, in March 2002, Riga-based Pentecostal pastor Aleksey Ledyayev flew to Moscow to address a conference of religious ministers; however, the authorities detained him at the airport for an estimated 9 to 11 hours before returning him to Riga. Authorities reportedly left Ledyayev's Russian visa in his Latvian passport without canceling it but offered no explanation for their actions. In the fall of 2002, a court in Khabarovsk attempted to deport two Mormon missionaries for failing to register their visas. Authorities did not always permit Mormon missionaries in Novgorod and Pskov to register their visas. In March, Moscow officials refused to register the visas of four foreign missionaries for Jehovah's Witnesses with the local police, citing the ongoing banning trial. The four eventually relocated to other cities within the country.

In addition, authorities either deported or denied entry to several religious workers with valid visas during the period covered by this report. The Keston News Service estimated that over the course of 2002, the Government acted to prevent access to the country to 19 religious workers by revoking the visas of 7 religious workers, denying visas to 8 others, and deporting 4 more.

In April 2002, two Roman Catholic religious workers, Bishop Jerzy Mazur of the diocese in Irkutsk, a Polish citizen, and Father Stefano Caprio, a priest in Vladimir, an Italian citizen, discovered while traveling abroad that the authorities had declared them *personae non gratae* and canceled their visas. Bishop Mazur is one of only four bishops for Russia. Three more priests, Fathers Krajnak, Wisniewski, and Mackiewicz, a Slovak, and two Poles, respectively, were denied entry in the fall of 2002. According to officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the priests were expelled on security grounds (article 27, part 1 of the Federal Law on Entry and Exit of the Territory of the Russian Federation). By the end of the reporting period, none of the five priests has been permitted back in the country. An estimated 85 percent of Catholic clergy in Russia are foreigners. Since the country's only Catholic seminary, in St. Petersburg, graduated its first class only in 2000, observers assert that it may take more than a decade for substantial numbers of native priests to be available to service the Catholic community. A spokesperson for Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz's office reports that other priests received visas throughout the winter and spring ranging in validity from three to twelve months. Celibate Catholic clergy do not have the option to gain permanent residency or citizenship on the basis of marriage to Russian citizens, unlike other religious workers who have done so.

The Government continues to deny a visa to the Dalai Lama. In September 2001, according to an Interfax news agency report, President Putin promised the Kalmyk President that he would order the Foreign Ministry to review its denial of a visa to the Tibetan holy man. Despite these assurances, the Lama again was refused a visa in early September 2002. Scores of Buddhists were reportedly detained and fined for holding unsanctioned protests outside the Foreign Ministry in August and September. A representative of the Moscow Buddhist community reported that he plans to reapply for the Dalai Lama's visa in the near future. The Dalai Lama last visited the country in 1991.

Mormons had difficulty securing visas for some of their foreign missionaries, particularly with the Vladivostok branch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In some cases, Mormons resorted to applying for tourist rather than religious visas. Tourist visas are easier to obtain but create problems for the missionaries when they attempt to register their visas in the country. The Mormons were unable to procure residency permits for missionaries in any of the regions except Moscow and Samara. Although they are being issued multiple-entry visas, the length varies (3 months to 1 year) from region to region. Church lawyers presume that officials in some areas, such as Chelyabinsk, have prevented foreign religious workers from registering in order to restrict foreign proselytizers. However, the authorities have never officially accused the Mormon missionaries of proselytism.

Individuals who have been denied visas continually include Dan Pollard of the Vanino Baptist Church in Khabarovsk region, whose visa application was rejected first in 1999 despite his acquittal on earlier tax and customs charges. A judge in Khabarovsk issued an order in July 2002 clearing Pollard of any obstacles to entering the country, but Khabarovsk officials have not complied. Charles Landreth of the Church of Christ in Volgograd was refused a visa in the fall of 1999 amid accusations in the Volgograd press of spying. Meetings with local Volgograd officials in January revealed that Landreth had been denied entry for traveling on an invalid visa, even

though the Russian Consulate in San Francisco had issued his religious visa.

In addition to Catholic Bishop Jerzy Mazur, who was denied reentry on security grounds, other instances of denial include Patrick Nolan, a member of the Unification Church, who was denied entry on June 2, 2002. After mounting a legal challenge to the expulsion, a subsequent court case revealed that the security services considered Nolan's activities a threat to the nation. Nolan lost both the court case on April 22 and an appeal before the Supreme Court on June 19. Swedish Evangelical Christian Leo Martensson, based in Krasnodar, was denied entry on September 10 despite his 9-year residence in the country. Larry Little of the Church of Christ in Komi has not been able to return to Russia since his religious visa was seized and cancelled in August 2001. No official reason for the cancellation has ever been given. Victor Barousse, a Christian working for the Global Strategy Missions Association in Irkutsk, had worked nine years in the country when he was declared a threat to state security in 2002 and prohibited from reentering. Randolph Marshall, a Protestant missionary working in Yaroslavl with the OMS Christian organization, was refused reentry in November 2002. Other examples continue to occur.

News service reports indicated that five missionaries who had been taking an active part in the work of the Christian Church in Kostroma were denied Russian visas to reenter in July. Jeff and Susan Wollman and Roland and Virginia Cook were among them. The Wollmans learned about their visa reentry denial in June 2002. On July 19, Vladimir Denisichev, President of the Association of the Evangelical Churches, addressed a request to the Consular Services of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a request for visas for the Wollmans and the Cooks and received the response that the two families were denied visas for state security reasons. On August 1, after the Wollmans' attempt to apply for a visa through the Kostroma regional department dealing with visas and registration issues, the Russian Embassy in Washington again denied their visas. On September 25, the Wollmans addressed Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov with a letter asking for an explanation why they were denied their visas. American preacher Bill Northon also was denied reentry under article 27. Northon was invited to Kostroma by "The Family of God" Pentecostal Church, but was denied a visa on three different occasions, starting in summer 2002, for the same state security reason. According to the church's pastor Andery Danilov, Bill Northon used to come to Russia twice a year.

The restitution of religious property seized by the Communist Government remains an issue. According to the Presidential Administration, since a 1993 decree on property restitution went into effect, 4,000 buildings have been returned to religious groups (of which approximately 3,500 were returned to the Russian Orthodox Church). 15,000 religious articles, including icons, torahs, and other items, also were returned. Most properties used for religious services, including churches, synagogues, and mosques, have been returned as well, although some in the Jewish community assert that only a small portion of the total properties confiscated under Soviet rule have been returned. The Jewish community is seeking the return of a number of synagogues, religious scrolls, and cultural and religious artifacts, such as the Schneerson book collection (a revered collection of the Chabad Lubavitch).

A news service reported on June 24 that authorities in Krasnodar officially refused to return a city synagogue confiscated in 1936, arguing that there were no alternative locations to house the occupants (a youth radio school). There were no functioning synagogues in Krasnodar Kray at the end of the period covered by this report. In May, Krasnodar officials refused a request by the Jewish community to stop construction of a sports complex that threatened to destroy a Jewish cemetery. Muslims in Krasnodar attempted unsuccessfully to gain authorization from the mayor's office to build a new mosque in the city of Sochi. They accuse the mayor and governor of Krasnodar of creating official barriers to construction. Catholics continue to pursue legal avenues towards restoration of the Saint Peter and Saint Paul cathedral in Moscow. The Russian Orthodox Church appears to have had greater success reclaiming prerevolutionary property than other groups.

On May 15, the Russian Supreme Court, overturning its own decision of earlier in the year, ruled that Muslim women will be allowed to wear headscarves for passport and other official photographs. In the case, which originated in the majority-Muslim republic of Tatarstan, the plaintiffs had argued that the scarves were required by their religion. Muslim groups welcomed the ruling.

While most conscripts looking for exemptions from military service sought medical or student

exemptions, the courts provided relief to others on the grounds of their religious convictions. Jehovah's Witnesses report 70 court cases where conscripts defended their rights not to serve in the military. Out of these 70 cases, 29 were adjudicated in favor of the objector, 17 against, and 23 cases were still ongoing. Also, there were 10 (from among these 70 cases) criminal cases initiated against Jehovah's Witnesses, who refuse military service. Of these, two were convicted, five were acquitted, and three cases are still ongoing. In the region of Kirov, there were several cases in which conscripts were denied the right to alternative service. Seven lost their court cases during the fall draft season, but one was allowed to avoid regular military service.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice represented several conscripts seeking religious waivers. On April 19, 2002, the Surazhskiy regional court in Bryansk Oblast upheld the complaint of evangelical Sergey Dorokhoviy against the local draft board. Dorokhoviy, who asserts that he is unwilling to perform his military service on the grounds of his religious convictions, had protested against the local draft board's decision to deny his request for alternative service, arguing that no law provided for such an exemption. Before the April 19 ruling, lower courts had twice upheld the draft board's decision. On December 25, 2001, the deputy chair of the Supreme Court lodged a protest with the presidium of the Bryansk Oblast court, which then ordered a retrial of Dorokhoviy's case in a lower court.

On June 19, Muslim Arslan Khasanov was sentenced to two years in prison for evasion of military service. Khasanov, the son of a Mednogorsk mullah, was charged in March 2002 after he refused to perform his military service on moral grounds arising from his opposition to the use of force against Muslims in Chechnya.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

There is evidence that terrorist attacks related to the Chechen conflict have prompted official action against the general Muslim population. On June 6, in a joint operation, representatives of the security services and the Ministry of the Interior carried out a raid on 121 Muslim terrorist suspects, 55 of whom were suspected members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an international Islamic group that was banned in the country in February. Officials freed most of the suspects the following day; criminal proceedings, on weapons charges, were opened against only two of the suspects. Human rights activists accused the Government of staging the raid as a propaganda ploy. Muslim leaders have claimed that various government bodies use the unsubstantiated claims of extremist and violent Islamic groups in an attempt to isolate Muslims from the greater community and lessen their political leverage.

The Bigotry Monitor reported on March 7 that on February 25, in Moscow, police beat "Ekho-TV" reporter Yuri Gusakov and called him "kike" and "kike-face" before taking him to the Kotlovo police station where they detained him for several hours. Gusakov was released after his parents paid \$65 (2,000 rubles) and Gusakov signed a document stating that he had no complaints about his treatment.

There were instances in which local officials detained individuals engaged in the public discussion of their religious views, but such incidences were resolved quickly. For example, local police frequently detained Mormon missionaries for brief periods throughout the country or asked them to cease their activities, such as displaying signboards on city streets, regardless of whether they were actually in violation of local statutes on picketing. In January, Mormon missionaries in Pskov were invited to participate in an English-language discussion group by an officer at a military base and then detained and interrogated for illegally entering the base. On January 21, 2002, in Vladivostok, three men, two of them in police uniform, stopped and physically assaulted two Mormon missionaries who were proselytizing in accordance with their religious worker visas. Neither victim reported serious physical injuries. Officials at the district police station refused to accept their complaint. Later intervention by the city police chief led to the case's resolution.

There were no reported instances of the forcible use of psychiatry in "deprogramming" victims of "totalitarian sects" during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious prisoners.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

As a participating state in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Russia has pledged to promote tolerance and non-discrimination and counter threats to security such as intolerance, aggressive nationalism, racist chauvinism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. In July, a Russian delegation attended an OSCE meeting in Geneva focusing on measures to combat anti-Semitism.

There are signs that government officials are taking more aggressive steps to counteract anti-Semitic publications. Beginning in 2002, the Ministry of Press has closed a number of publications and charged others with violating article 282 of the Criminal Code (inciting ethnic hatred). In June 2002, the local prosecutor's office in Ulyanovsk opened a criminal case under Article 282 against the editor of the local newspaper "Orthodox Simbirsk," who ran a number of articles demonizing Jews. In January, there were preliminary hearings in Leninskiy District Court. The case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. In July 2002, the Ministry of Press ordered the closure of a newspaper run by the openly anti-Semitic politician Viktor Korchagin. In December, the Moscow City Court accepted a suit brought against Korchagin for inciting hatred against Jews. The case was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report.

On June 10, a delegation composed of representatives from major foreign Jewish organizations met with President Putin. The President also publicly expressed his support for improved relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and Roman Catholics. Prime Minister Kasyanov has stated his support for a papal visit to Moscow.

The Russian Academy for State Service held multiple conferences during the period covered by this report to examine the issue of religious tolerance. A broad range of national and international participants with differing views attended the conferences. The Presidential Academy of State Service also worked with religious freedom advocates such as the Slavic Center for Law and Justice to train regional and municipal officials in the proper implementation of the law.

During the reporting year, the Government was more active in preventing or reversing discriminatory actions taken at the local level by more actively disseminating information to the regions and, when necessary, reprimanding the officials at fault. President Putin also sought stricter and more consistent application of federal laws in the many regions of the country. Working through the Procuracy, the Ministry of Justice, the Presidential Administration, and the courts, the Government has worked to persuade the regions to bring their laws into conformance with federal laws and with the Constitution. Pressure at the federal level reportedly led local officials to rescind an order to dissolve a Muslim mosque in Vologda.

While isolated difficulties with registration continue to appear in different regions around the country, human rights lawyers and representatives of religious minorities report that such difficulties related to the 1997 law have decreased during the period covered by this report. Local courts have upheld the right of non-traditional groups to register or reregister in a number of cases. For example, on April 2, a Chelyabinsk court dismissed a second appeal by the Procurator's office seeking to deny registration to a local youth branch of the Unification Church. An earlier attempt of the regional procurator's office, supported by the Chelyabinsk branch of the Ministry of Justice had been unsuccessful.

In some cases, religious organizations successfully enlisted the assistance of the judiciary to overcome bureaucratic resistance to their registration. A Catholic parish in Magadan, run by U.S. citizen Father Michael Shields, came under continued threat of liquidation by local authorities. Father Shields recently won a court case that challenged the legality of his nomination as priest of the local Catholic parish on the grounds that he is a foreign citizen. Although his parish avoided liquidation, the new Magadan cathedral remains unconsecrated in symbolic recognition of Bishop Mazur's absence, despite the new Bishop's arrival.

Religious groups continued to make use of a February 2002 ruling of the Constitutional Court in

the Moscow Salvation Army case to challenge liquidation orders. On August 29, a local judge ruled against the liquidation of the Vanino Baptist Church, basing the decision on that ruling.

There were improvements in the restoration of religious property. In June, city authorities in Oryol approved the restitution of a synagogue in the city after years of petitions by the local Jewish community. The synagogue had been built in 1912 but was confiscated by the Soviet Government. The Buryat leaders of the traditional Buddhist Sangha (Organization) won back the rights to the oldest Buddhist temple in Europe, which was erected in St. Petersburg with funds from the Dalai Lama and the Romanovs in 1909. A more secular group had occupied the temple for the past four years, despite a 2002 city court decision in favor of the Sangha. City officials supported the efforts of the traditional organization to occupy the temple.

In May, representatives of ten faiths came together to stage the Third Interconfessional Exhibition in Moscow's All-Russian Exhibition Center, where they displayed and distributed literature, videocassettes, devotional articles, and goods produced by religious business enterprises. Participants included representatives of the Russian Orthodox, Muslim, Armenian Apostolic, Buddhist, Jewish, Evangelical Christian-Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh-day Adventist, and Evangelical Lutheran faiths. According to organizers, the exhibition was intended to promote dialog and tolerance among major religions represented in the country. The main sponsor was the Moscow City government.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

Religious matters are not a source of societal hostility for most citizens; however, many citizens firmly believe that at least nominal adherence to the Russian Orthodox Church is at the heart of what it means to be Russian. Popular attitudes toward traditionally Muslim ethnic groups are negative in many regions, and there are manifestations of anti-Semitism as well as societal hostility toward Catholics and newer, non-Orthodox, religions. Instances of religiously motivated violence continue, although it was often difficult to determine whether xenophobia, religion, or ethnic prejudices were the primary motivation behind violent attacks. Conservative activists claiming ties to the Russian Orthodox Church disseminated negative publications and staged demonstrations throughout the country against Catholics, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and religions new to the country, and some Russian Orthodox Church leaders publicly expressed similar views.

There is no large-scale movement in the country to promote interfaith dialog, although on the local level religious groups successfully collaborate on charity projects and participate in interfaith dialog. Russian Pentecostal and Baptist organizations, as well as the Russian Orthodox Church, have been reluctant to support ecumenism. At the international level, the Russian Orthodox Church has traditionally pursued interfaith dialog with other Christians; however, the Patriarch and other Russian Orthodox Church representatives expressed grave displeasure at the Vatican's February 2002 decision to upgrade its four apostolic administrations to dioceses. Clerics, parliamentarians, and members of conservative groups closely associated with Russian Orthodox and Muslim hierarchies made numerous hostile statements opposing the decision and continue to consider it a source of tension.

Muslims, the largest religious minority, continue to encounter societal discrimination and antagonism in some areas. Discrimination has become stronger since the onset of the conflict in the predominantly Muslim region of Chechnya and the takeover of a Moscow theater by armed Chechen separatists on October 23. Muslims have claimed that citizens in certain regions have an irrational fear of Muslims, citing cases such as a dispute in Kolomna 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. In the fall of 2002 and spring of 2003, several prominent human rights activists expressed concern about the rise in anti-Islamic attitudes.

Numerous press reports have documented anti-Islamic acts. The Washington Post reports that "since September 11, 2001, a Muslim cemetery was desecrated in Krasnodar, a mysterious shooting took place inside a mosque in Irkutsk, a gang broke into a mosque construction site an hour before the groundbreaking ceremony in Volgograd, Muslim women reported having scarves ripped off their heads in Tatarstan, and mullahs were no longer invited to open Tatar political meetings with prayers." The Bigotry Monitor reported that "on May 30, 2003, glass

bottles with flammable mixtures were thrown into a mosque in Irkutsk Oblast, damaging the roof and walls. No injuries were reported among the worshippers who were in the mosque at the time of the incident."

Muslim activists complain that Russia is not entirely a secular state, based on the Government's active support of the Russian Orthodox majority. Muslim recruits serving in the army often are subjected to insults and abuse on the basis of religion. Tatarstan's human rights ombudsman reported that many Muslim youths have deserted the army rather than risk going to Chechnya and fighting fellow Muslims.

In Muslim-dominated regions, relations between Muslims and Russian Orthodox believers are generally harmonious. In the Volga region, a liberal brand of Islamic thought dubbed "Euro-Islam" has been growing in influence. However, tensions occasionally emerge. In July, a group of Muslim women in Naberezhniye Chelny, Tatarstan attempted to remove masonry at the construction site for an Orthodox church they said was being erected illegally in a local park. On October 1, the site was vandalized again and the authorities opened a criminal case against the alleged perpetrators. The construction site represents the fourth location that the Orthodox have been allocated by the local authorities.

On May 30, a mosque in Usole-Sibirsk was fire bombed during a worship service. No one was injured in the attack.

Law enforcement organs are closely watching three Muslim groups operating in Sverdlovsk Oblast, in the communities of Krasno-Ufimsk, Pervo-Uralsk, and Yekaterinburg. Calling them extremists, officials have opened criminal cases in the past for distribution of hate literature (but not weapons charges or more severe criminal offenses). In March law enforcement officers confiscated literature that they described as extremist from the local Muslim community in Yekaterinburg. The groups are influential with local Muslims but focus their efforts mainly on the conflict in Chechnya.

Official discrimination, vandalism, and occasional violence against Jews continued, although Jewish leaders have stated publicly that the state-sponsored anti-Semitism of the Soviet era no longer exists. Contrary to previous reporting periods, there were no reports of tax collectors harassing synagogues.

Despite high-level attention to the event, there were no prosecutions in connection with the May 2002 incident in which 28-year-old Tatyana Sapunova was injured severely when trying to remove an anti-Semitic sign that contained an explosive device near Moscow. In June and July 2002, more than fifteen such signs calling for "Death to Kikes" and other slogans were discovered on the roads and streets around the country, some booby-trapped with homemade bombs or grenades, others with fake explosives. Two people died from injuries sustained in attempting to pull signs down. Other devices, without explosives, were found outside Moscow. Moscow police spokesman, Farid Khasanov, referred to one of the mock booby-trapped signs with an anti-semitic message as a "practical joke." President Putin awarded Sapunova the Order of Courage and received her in the Kremlin in July 2002.

In September 2002, a dozen skinhead youths beat up four yeshiva students in Moscow, and in the city of Orenburg, unknown assailants attacked a group of Orthodox Jewish schoolboys. In April a bomb was planted in central Moscow close to a synagogue on Bolshaya Bronnaya Street, although it was not clear whether the bomb was intended to damage the synagogue or a nearby apartment. No one was hurt in the incident. In the weeks leading up to and following the anniversary of Hitler's birth on April 20, Jewish centers and synagogues were vandalized in Petrozavodsk, Kostroma, Yoshkar-Ola, Novgorod, and St. Petersburg. In the St. Petersburg case, police apprehended the vandals. There were incidents of synagogue vandalism in March and April 2002 in Ulyanovsk, Orenburg, Yoshkar-Ola (Republic of Mari-El), and Kostroma. In Voronezh, vandals broke the windows of a synagogue several times in June. In July, swastikas were drawn on the fence around the St. Petersburg synagogue. In December, Human Rights Ombudsman Mironov called for increased tolerance in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Russia after an incident in Kostroma where a group of young men scrawled anti-Semitic graffiti on a synagogue and broke several windows.

On May 5, 2002, in Rostov, there was an arson attempt on a 130-year-old synagogue. According to the rabbi, the synagogue's windows had been broken five times in the preceding

weeks. A synagogue in Yaroslavl was vandalized three times in May and June. On June 28, a synagogue in Kostroma was vandalized. According to a local Jewish leader, the synagogue has suffered numerous attacks in recent years.

Cemetery desecration remained one of the most common types of anti-Semitic attacks. A cemetery in Pyatigorsk, the only Jewish cemetery in Stavropol Kray, was desecrated in June. In April, forty-two gravestones were destroyed in a cemetery in Makhachkala, Dagestan. A number of other Jewish cemeteries were vandalized during the period covered by this report.

Vandals desecrated tombstones in cemeteries dominated by other religious and ethnic minorities in numerous other cases. They include: an Armenian cemetery in Krasnodar in April 2002, Muslim tombs in a Volgograd cemetery in July, a Moscow region cemetery for war prisoners in June, several cemeteries in Irkutsk in July, 400 tombs in Moscow in September, and several acts of vandalism in Kaliningrad. These attacks usually were accompanied by swastikas and other ultra-nationalist symbols.

The ultranationalist and anti-Semitic Russian National Unity (RNE) paramilitary organization continued to propagate hostility toward Jews and non-Orthodox Christians. The RNE appears 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. In March 2003, a synagogue in Krasnovarsk was desecrated with anti-semitic and "RNE" graffiti. RNE graffiti has appeared in a number of cities, including Krasnodar. A Jewish NGO reported RNE recruitment activities in five localities in the Kostroma region during 2002. In the village of Loparevo, RNE members reportedly attacked a Jewish teenager, leaving him with a concussion and other injuries. In Nerekhta, the RNE posted anti-Semitic leaflets and openly threatened Jewish residents.

A splinter group of the RNE called "Russian Rebirth" has 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 successfully limited the activities of the RNE by denying registration to their local affiliates. Despite losing its registration as a political party, the National Power Party of Russia (NDPR) is still active. On June 12, NDPR activists distributed their newspaper Russian Front in downtown Kostroma along with leaflets reading "Russia, liberate yourself from kike fascism."

A large number of small, radical-nationalist newspapers are distributed throughout the country. They carry anti-Semitic, as well as anti-Muslim and xenophobic leaflets. Jewish organizations published a tally of 73 newspapers and publications that carried anti-Semitic content during the period 2001-2002. However, traditionally anti-Semitic publications with large distributions, such as the newspaper Zavtra, appear to be more careful than in the past about using crude anti-Semitic language.

The number of underground nationalist-extremist organizations (as distinguished from such quasi public groups as RNE) appears to be growing. According to the Ministry of the Interior, there are some 50,000 skinheads in the country, including 2,500 in Moscow. The primary targets of skinheads are foreigners and individuals from the Northern Caucasus, but they express anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments as well. As in previous years, nationalists distributed anti-Semitic literature in Moscow and elsewhere during the Victory Day holiday in May.

For several years the Patriarch has conditioned any visit by the Pope on the settlement of outstanding issues between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, such as allegedly "aggressive" Catholic proselytizing in the country and on Russian Orthodox and Catholic relationships with Ukraine's Greek Catholic Church, which recognizes Rome's authority. In a September interview with an Italian Catholic magazine, Patriarch Aleksiy said that the Vatican must drop its "expansionist strategy" if it wanted to improve relations. The Russian Orthodox Church, which had objected strongly to the papal visit to Ukraine in June 2001, disapproved of a proposed papal visit to Kazan in the summer. In September, five Russian Orthodox priests in Rostov carried out an airborne religious procession via helicopter, in which they circled the town and neighboring villages praying that the country would be rid of Catholics.

The Vatican's February 2002 decision to upgrade its apostolic administrations to dioceses continued to be a source of controversy. Several local newspapers in the summer and fall of 2002 published anti-Catholic articles, such as an item that appeared in Vologda's "Our Region"

newspapers on July 31, which accused Catholics of espionage. Over the summer, Franciscan monks were portrayed in a Moscow newspaper and on television as running a whorehouse out of an apartment. The Russian Journalists Union later condemned the stories as false reporting. In September, unknown assailants shot out the windows of the Catholic Church in Rostov.

Hostility toward "nontraditional" religious groups sparked occasional harassment and even physical attacks. Jehovah's Witnesses are still referred to routinely in the press as a religious "sect," although they have been present in the country for some 100 years. A common prejudice circulating among the general public is that Jehovah's Witnesses are "spies of imperialism." In January, a Jehovah's Witness and her grandmother were beaten to death in Astrakhan. Police found crosses carved into the bodies of the victims and drawn on the walls of their home, leading them to classify the crime as a murder with possible religious motives.

The Jehovah's Witnesses Organization cites two cases in which courts have reportedly discriminated against their religion in cases of child custody. In Dagestan, in April 2002, a mother lost custody of her two children to an absentee father. As a result, his parents are raising the children. The case has been appealed to the European Court of Human Rights. On June 19, a court in Bashkortostan ordered a mother not to take her children to worship services. The case has been appealed to the Supreme Court.

On March 8, two Mormon missionaries in Vladivostok were attacked by a group of approximately ten intoxicated youths who accompanied their actions with negative remarks about Mormons and Americans. One of the missionaries was beaten unconscious and suffered a dislocated shoulder. There were no reports that any of the culprits were apprehended.

According to the pastor of an evangelical church in the town of Chekhov, Moscow Oblast, the authorities failed to arrest any suspects in an April 2001 arson case directed against the church, and have since abandoned the investigation. There also had been no action in the severe 2001 beating of the pastor of the church, a beating accompanied by both racial and religious insults aimed at the African-born pastor.

On January 18, six individuals vandalized the Moscow Andrey Sakharov Museum by pouring red paint on the walls and paintings and smashing windows in a room housing an exhibition of modern art entitled "Danger, Religion." Upon their arrest, the vandals explained that the exhibition offended their Russian Orthodox beliefs.

Speakers associated with the Russian Orthodox Church took part in anti-sect conferences and meetings around the country. A conference in Yekaterinburg on "Totalitarian Sects as a Threat of Religious Extremism" brought together leading regional politicians and religious leaders. One such speaker claimed that Jehovah's Witnesses and Krishnaites were "totalitarian sects" that had existed underground during the Soviet period. He also referred to Pentecostals as a fraudulent and occult movement. Andrey Kurayev, a Russian Orthodox priest, also warned against sects in publications and on the Internet. One such publication calls for the classification of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church as political organizations, which would legally deprive them of financial support from abroad.

In St. Petersburg, the local branch of the pro-Putin youth organization "Moving Together" held a demonstration in February against the Church of Scientology. City officials refused to extend Moving Together's permit and broke up the demonstration. Another organization of young communist sympathizers held a demonstration against a St. Petersburg center run by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Members of some religions continued to face discrimination in their efforts to rent premises and conduct group activities. Religious minorities report both official pressure and personal prejudice as obstacles to renting space. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, which does not recognize the Moscow Patriarchate's authority, has also experienced problems gaining access to gathering places. The Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy's long tenure renting a local community center from a private organization was inexplicably interrupted in July, and at the end of the reporting period, the group had not yet managed to secure a new space.

A continuing pattern of violence, with either religious or political motivations, against religious workers in the North Caucasus was evident during the period covered by this report. Foreign religious workers have been deterred or prohibited from entering war zones in the North

Caucasus, and information about religious activity in the area is largely unavailable.

Section IV U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

The U.S. Government continued to engage the Government, a number of religious groups, NGOs, and others in a steady dialog on religious freedom. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the Consulates General in Yekaterinburg, St. Petersburg, and Vladivostok were active throughout the period in investigating reports of violations of religious freedom. U.S. Government

officials engaged a broad range of Russian officials, representatives of religious groups, and human rights activists on a daily basis. In the period covered by this report, such contacts included government officials, representatives of over 20 religious confessions, the Slavic Law and Justice Center, the Esther Legal Information Center, the Anti-Defamation League, lawyers representing religious groups, journalists, academics, and human rights activists known for their commitment to religious freedom.

The Embassy and Consulates have 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 discuss religious freedom with high-ranking officials in the Presidential Administration and the Government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, raising specific cases of concern. Russian federal officials have responded by investigating some of those cases and 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 Ministry of Justice, Presidential Administration, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Embassy's strategy for addressing religious freedom centers around maintaining a broad range of contacts in the religious and NGO community via frequent communication and meetings. Two positions in the Embassy's political section are dedicated to human rights and religious freedom issues. These officers work closely with consular officers in Moscow and other U.S. Consulates around the country.

Consular officers routinely investigate criminal, customs, and immigration cases involving foreign citizens with a view to determining whether they involve possible violations of religious freedom. Consular officers also raised the issue of visas for religious workers with the Passport and Visa Unit in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Embassy officers also meet with missionaries during regional travel in the country's interior.

The U.S. Ambassador addressed the theme of religious freedom in public addresses and consultations with government officials. He attended events on major religious holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and Ramadan. On December 20, the Ambassador held a meeting with Minister of Justice Yuriy Chayka and expressed concern over the inconsistent application of registration requirements by regional MOJ officials. In November, the Deputy Chief of Mission hosted a reception for fifty religious workers and government officials to focus on religious freedom issues.

The U.S. Government presses for the country's adherence to international standards of religious freedom. Officials in the State Department meet regularly with U.S.-based human rights groups and religious organizations concerned about religious freedom, as well as with visiting representatives of Russian religious organizations. In October and again in May, an officer with responsibilities for religious freedom traveled from Washington to hold meetings in Moscow with faith-based groups and several human rights groups on religious issues. The meetings focused on the importance of respecting the rights of minority religions. On November 7, 11 members of the United States Helsinki Commission and 6 members of Congress urged President Putin to correct a pattern of religious discrimination against foreign religious workers from targeted minority faiths. In their letter, the politicians and activists focused on a perceived pattern of denial of visas to religious workers.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) works to promote tolerance and human

rights. USAID/Russia awarded a grant to the Bay Area Council for Jewish Rescue and Renewal to continue promoting its "Climate of Trust" program. The program focuses on forming and strengthening Regional Tolerance Councils in Kazan, Ryazan, and Leningrad Oblast. Ethnic and religious leaders, local government officials, and NGO representatives participate in the Councils. In June, the grantee organized a conference on combating hate crimes in Ryazan for over a hundred students and cadets of the Ryazan branch of the Moscow University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Also in June, the grantee organized a conference for a hundred participants in Kazan to focus on relations among diverse religious groups (including Russian Orthodox, Muslims, and Catholics). Participants attended from the northwest and central regions, the Volga region, and Stavropol, and included ethnic and religious representatives, government officials, and NGO activists.

With financial support from USAID and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), the Volga Humanitarian and Theological Institute in Nizhny Novgorod launched a program to develop legislation in support of the separation of church and state. The program included educational elements concerning the Government's role in public life, civil society, and national identity in the Volga district. USAID/IREX funding also supported the activities of the Ural NGO Support Center in Perm to develop a model program intended to increase effectiveness of Perm youth organizations and build tolerance among youth in the region.

The Open World Leadership Program operated by the legislative branch and housed in the Library of Congress sent a delegation of Russian visitors to the U.S. in June to focus on issues of religious tolerance. Their program included meetings with U.S. Representatives Chris Cannon and Jeff Flake; roundtables at George Washington University, Catholic University and Brigham Young University; and briefings with U.S. officials.

The U.S. Government organized exchanges under the International Visitor program with a focus on religious freedom issues during the period covered by this report. Russian local, regional, and federal officials went to the U.S. in January to participate in the program "Promoting Dialog and tolerance across Ethnic Lines." A group of mullahs, imams, Islamic journalists and directors of Islamic cultural centers participated in a U.S. visitor program entitled "Promoting Multiculturalism: Islam in the U.S."

During the period covered by this report, the Embassy's Democracy Commission, a small (up to \$25,000 – approximately 775,000 rubles) grants program supporting Russian NGOs pursuing projects related to ethnic, racial and religious tolerance, approved seven tolerance-related grants totaling approximately \$75,000 (2,325,000 rubles).

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